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A Drama in Four Acts

BY

URBAN NAGLE, O.P.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
MRS. A. STARR BEST

The Winning Biblical Play of the 1928
Drama League—Longmans, Green and Co.
Playwriting Contest

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NAGLE

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To My Mother

FOREWORD

I WISH to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. G. A. LaRock at whose insistence this play was put on paper. I am also deeply indebted to my superiors and colleagues of the Order of Preachers for their co-operation and constructive criticism; particularly Bede Sullivan and Anselm Townsend who carefully read the text, and Christopher Powell who is responsible for the title.

URBAN NAGLE, O.P.

ON THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA CONTEST

In planning for two years a national contest for the best religious drama, the Drama League and Longmans, Green and Co. have been actuated by several motives. In the first place it is plainly evident that the appreciation of the importance of drama in church and Sunday school activities is rapidly spreading to every community.

Ten years ago, immediately following the war, when every agency was seeking to quicken its activities and broaden its influence, the Drama League first started among the church boards the idea of welcoming back inside the church portals the drama so long exiled from its doors. Instantly alive to the real value of this suggestion, the different boards, almost as a whole, set about utilizing this newly refound medium for revitalizing church methods. In church after church and group after group, the use of religious drama was adopted. Instantly became apparent the paralyzing scarcity of suitable worthwhile material. Almost before the movement could be called established, the cry went up, "what can we use?" At that time there existed barely twenty-five really dignified media for church drama. Unfortunately in the urge to supply this need, quantities of so-called dramatic material, have been produced which are of very dubious value. Writers with no back-

ground or knowledge of drama were attempting to write plays which, without the winnowing of criticism by expert critics were being rushed into print by church boards with no knowledge of drama. The boards were draining from the inexperienced lay writers and the material being given to the new groups was falling far below desired art standards. In this emergency the Drama League launched several playwriting contests in the hope of awakening the interest of the experienced professional writers to this new field of activity. The earlier contests were restricted to plays purely Biblical dealing with actual narrations in the Bible. As a result of these four earlier contests some of the best of the material now available was given to the field. Two winners of these contests have never been equalled by any other plays dealing with Biblical material and are still the most popular and effective plays given — *The Rock* by Mary Hamlin and *Saint Claudia* by Marshall Goold.

When the Drama League and Longmans, Green and Co. determined to set out definitely upon the task of encouraging the amateur writer in America and to offer him a chance for recognition and actual production in the professional field by extending opportunities equal to the professional and more readily available, the Religious Drama Chairman naturally enough begged for recognition of the importance of the church and church school field in this undertaking and demanded a section to stimulate the writing of religious dramas.

Accordingly Longmans, Green and Co. graciously and generously allowed a section of the contest to be thrown open to the writer of religious plays in the

hope that experienced writers of ability as well as gifted amateurs would see the value of this phase of writing and its opportunity. The use of drama in church is rapidly assuming the threat of becoming more of liability than an asset owing to the poor quality of plays used, unless better writing and a more virile and modern attack can be introduced.

As a result of the first contest a play of unusual artistic beauty and literary style was produced — *Pharaoh's Daughter* by Dr. and Mrs. Allison Gaw of Los Angeles was a worthy winner of the 1927 national contest. It is an ambitious and dramatic conception of the emotional struggle between Moses and his immediate connections when his ultimate leadership had to be decided upon and is a most sympathetic and understanding portrayal of great mother love. The great love of Pharaoh's Daughter well motivates the play.

In the contest of 1928 just closed, the prize has fallen upon a very different play. In *Barter* by Brother Urban Nagle, we have portrayed a New Testament theme with utmost respect and with great vividness. The author has chosen to take the dramatic figure of Judas, treating him according to the modern reading of his character and has shown most forcefully the terrific influence and reactions of the great event of the betrayal. There are many unusual features in the handling of the material and Judas and his friends, his temptation, struggle, and remorse together with their suffering are made human and very forceful. Brother Urban Nagle is a member of the Dominican Order of Washington, D. C., and shows his deep insight into church history in the intimate details of the play. For Holy Week this new

treatment of the betrayal will be a moving and poetic material with vivid insight into the deep spirit of the days.

Of the religious section of the contest as a whole much of interest might be said. One hundred and twenty-seven plays were submitted, sent from thirty-two states and many more cities. Every section of the country was represented and all walks of life; there were fully as many men as women interested in the contest and submitting plays. On the whole the contest this year showed several things — first of all, a very decided improvement in the mechanical treatment of material and a better understanding of the requirements; more than that, it seemed to indicate a deeper appreciation of the significance of religious drama and a gradually growing conviction that a mere Bible story does not necessarily connote either religion or drama; there seemed to be evolving this year slowly but surely a realization of the fact that there must be back of the story, a theme that has a real vital relationship with life and can touch it in its modern aspects.

Above all was very evident, the tendency to shift the forms of writing from the Old to the New Testament. Heretofore in other contests almost the entire bulk of the material was based on the Old Testament; in this contest the urge seemed to centre on the New Testament and beyond that chiefly on the lives and works of the Apostles and early Christians. In fact many plays of fairly good dramatic value had to be passed by because their material was such as to be of no great moment in present living while beautifully illuminating the vicissitudes of the early martyrs.

The plays as a whole were easily classified as those dealing with Bible anecdote — largely if not wholly from the Old Testament with the exception of the Passion material; plays dealing with the Apostles and early saints and martyrs; and a very few symbolic allegories.

It is to be deplored that there were only three attempts to project a modern ethical play dealing spiritually with present-day problems. It is interesting to note that of the three plays which won the judges' highest votes, two dealt with Judas. The other was a very modernized treatment of the story of Lot's wife, with a Sodom which might well be translated into any of our metropolitan activities, and a family for Lot which well suggested our flapper young folk.

The judges this year were Dr. Norman E. Richardson, a well-known leader in religious education, author of many books and trainer of several hundred religious education directors, who has kindly served us for many previous contests; Dr. George Reid Andrews, the tireless secretary of Church and Drama Association, who is chiefly concerned with a daily study of the values of drama to modern life; and the writer, the Chairman of the Religious Drama Department of the Drama League, and of the contest, who is also the director of the first organized church group, the Pilgrim Players of Evanston. Dr. Richardson wrote of the contest, sincere congratulations upon the marked improvement from year to year.

It can safely be said that with the exception of the drama *Good Friday* by Masefield and Don Marquis' *Dark Hours,* both of which are well nigh unactable by amateurs, the winner of this year's contest will furnish

the best portrayal of the dark side of the Crucifixion, providing a moving and sincere preparation for the depths of Holy Week and the Joy of Easter.

In the contest were entered many one-act plays which could scarcely be measured against the full length. Some of these seemed to possess considerable value and to offer possibilities for church groups desiring simpler material. Accordingly at the earnest request of the chairman the publishers have graciously consented to print a volume of the one-act plays, chosen by the chairman as most significant in the contest.

There are ten of these plays of varied characteristics and every style. They will be found useful and usable on occasions when a short simple medium is desired.

The sponsors of the contest feel that the effort is justified not because it has produced a play of the merit and beauty of *Barter* and a volume of usable one-acts but also because we can feel that a broader sense of the values of drama in religious material is gradually being absorbed by our writers.

Mrs. A. Starr Best
Chairman

BARTER

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MIRIAM, *daughter of Jobal*
LORA, *servant*
JOBAL, *of the Sanhedrin*
ESTHER, *daughter of Jobal*
MARY, *of Magdala*
RHEA, *Jobal's second wife*
PHANUEL, *of Judea*
OREB, *servant to Varrus*
VARRUS, *under Pontius Pilate*
JUDAS, *the Iscariot*
MOTHER OF JUDAS

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I Room of the House of Jobal
ACT II Headquarters of Varrus, in the Fortress Antonia
ACT III Dungeon in the Fortress Antonia
ACT IV Same as Act I

TIME

The action of the play begins on the afternoon of Holy Thursday, and ends just after Jesus Christ dies on the Cross — twenty-four hours later.

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ACT I

Scene: Jobal's house. Part of the roof.
[*Note: It is called the roof because it is above the rooms on the ground floor, but it is really only an open space between two rooms of the second story. The audience is looking at the scene from the inner court — Jewish houses of rank are built in the form of a quadrangle. The rooms of the second floor — which form the exits from the stage — are the living rooms of the family, the ground floor being taken up by servants' quarters, kitchens, etc.*]
Right: A doorway opening upon a room off stage. There are two small latticed windows, one on each side of it, and the doorway itself is closed by a curtain of rich stuff.
Rear: Three or four feet from the backdrop is a low crenelated protecting wall — about two and one-half feet in height — which forms the rear of the playing stage. It extends from the room on the right to that on the left.
Left: Occupying all but the front section of the left stage wall, and protruding somewhat onto the playing stage is another room. In front of this room the stage continues as a balcony overlooking the inner court. This balcony which continues into the wing is designated as Left Front. The room at this side opens on

the stage by means of a door in its side wall. Its front wall is broken by a window.

Over the rear guard wall may be seen the city of Jerusalem — the cyclorama. The city wall extends from the right foreground in a diagonal line towards the horizon at the left. Outside the city (to the right of the wall) is a small hill, not more than a mile from the house. In the first act, this wall is not very conspicuous. Inside the wall is the skyline of the city.

On the stage, just right of centre, on a heavy rug, is a low table. In back of this are two comfortable divans. A couple of low stools or hassocks complete the furniture of the room. Colored awnings may be rolled up against the right and left walls.

Time: Early afternoon, Holy Thursday.

AT RISE: *Miriam is seated on a divan at left centre, reading parchments of scripture. Lora, a servant, enters from right carrying a water-jar.*

MIRIAM. To the well, Lora?

LORA [*putting down the jar and standing left of table*]. Yes, my lady. Before the camel caravans come from the north and east.

MIRIAM. And thou afraid of camel caravans? 'Tis well for us that thou wert not Rebecca.

LORA. But Abraham's servant came at God's command to find Rebecca.

MIRIAM. As some great caravan may search the wells of all the world for thee. Bid Esther come to me before thou goest. 'Tis time I read for her.

LORA [*picking up water-jar*]. Yes, my lady. [*Lora goes off left front, e.g. along balcony — crossing Jobal who enters left. Then she goes out the same door. Jobal, a venerable patriarch with a flowing white beard, wears the phylacteries on his forehead. They consist of a small parchment box divided into four compartments, each containing a writing from the Bible. The box is fastened by cords which go around his head and hang down on his breast. His rich tunic, girdle, and mantle, indicate wealth and high rank.*]

JOBAL. A judgment out of heaven is upon this generation . . . this very generation.

MIRIAM. Father ! Thou art troubled ? And the feast day now at hand !

JOBAL [*coming to the middle and stopping to gesticulate before his daughter*]. Troubled ? Should I be unmoved when devils fill the streets ? [*Pacing up and down.*] Devils and blasphemers ! And we who needs must answer this — the Sanhedrin — do nothing.

MIRIAM. Thou takest on thy shoulders blame for wrongs of all the world. It is not just to thee, my father. Last week, 'twas the Nazarene.

JOBAL [*gruffly*]. And this week it is more of Him. Till Juda rids herself of Him, no moment's rest is hers. The world thinks Him a prophet. They say, the other day He called a rotting corpse to life.

MIRIAM. Called dead to life ? That could not be ! How canst thou fear such idle words will lead astray the people ?

JOBAL. Thou knowest not the power of idle words.

MIRIAM. But what real evil hath He wrought ? These prodigies thou speakest of seem good and just and kindly.

JOBAL [*angrily*]. Before thy words call down a curse from God Himself, be still. No child of mine shall praise a low blasphemer. No daughter of a Jobal shall defend a man who worketh by strange powers in the air, who maketh signs, and muttereth soft words. No child of mine shall bless a Sabbath breaker. [*Coming towards the table, he picks up the scripture parchments which Miriam was reading and puts them down with such force that his action approaches irreverence.*] Jobal's house hath learned the law, and doth revere the prophets. [*Strides out haughtily at right.*]

LORA [*entering left front*]. My lady, where can Esther be ? I cannot find her anywhere.

MIRIAM [*rising*]. Not in the house ? It cannot be ! She will be lost. Those sightless eyes cannot tell day from night. My cloak ! Be quick ! [*Lora goes off right.*] All things are strange to her and in their strangeness, all things are familiar. Darkness ! Hopeless darkness !

LORA [*returning with mantle*]. Fear not ! She cannot have gone far. [*Going over to the balustrade and looking down.*] Someone hath just gone in the court below.

MIRIAM. Run down and see if it be she. [*Lora hurries out left front. Miriam waits nervously.*] If any harm befell her — oh, I must not think such things.

LORA [*off stage*]. 'Tis she. [*Returning.*] I knew

'twere folly to be so upset. Thou knowest well how God protects His little ones.

[*Esther, a little blind girl about ten years old, enters left front. She is followed by a strange woman, simply dressed but of singular beauty.*]

MIRIAM. Where hast thou been? Why hast thou done this, Esther? Why hast thou passed the gate? Dost thou not know that in the city camel trains may ride thee down and wicked men steal thee? Where hast thou been, my little one?

ESTHER. Why, Miriam! I only took a tiny, tiny walk — and then — our wall was gone. I cried for thee a long, long time, and then this lady found me.

MIRIAM [*to the stranger*]. And thou who wert so good to her, wilt thou forgive my rudeness? I had forgotten thou wert here, her loss had so upset me.

STRANGER. Thy love for her is more than an apology. Thou art her Miriam, of whom we talked the whole way home?

MIRIAM. Yes, I am she. [*Smiling at Esther.*] Why didst thou speak thus, Esther? [*Putting her arms about the little one and kissing her.*] Yet, Miriam is glad to have thee back with thy new friend.

ESTHER [*drawing Miriam's head down to her own*]. Whisper to me. Is the lady beautiful? I think there could be none so beautiful in all the world — but thou.

MIRIAM [*whispers to Esther and the child smiles*]. Promise, dear, that thou wilt never go away again.

ESTHER [*sobbing*]. Never, Miriam. I am so sorry.

MIRIAM. What! Tears on such a dirty face? They

will turn to mud. Go with Lora for thy newest robe — the one of silk — that thy friend may think she found a princess. [*Esther leaves Miriam and takes Lora by the hand, going out right. Miriam turns to the stranger.*] Thou wilt surely let me call my father. He would grieve if thou wert gone from here ere he could thank thee.

STRANGER [*still standing at the door*]. It is so late and I have very far to go. To talk to such a lovely child has many times repaid me.

MIRIAM [*taking the stranger's arm*]. Not a single moment more ?

STRANGER [*softly*]. Thy father — Jobal — might not wish to see me.

MIRIAM. My father might not wish to see thee ! How canst thou speak thus ?

STRANGER. Because I follow One Whom people call the Wonder-Worker. Thy father is aware of that. It might embarrass him to have to speak with me.

MIRIAM [*surprised*]. Dost thou believe in magic ? 'Tis strange that such as thou shouldst be misled. My father calls His deeds the Powers of Darkness.

STRANGER. Can Power of Darkness bring us back our dead ? Those who are rotting in the tomb need more than craft of magic.

MIRIAM. Dost thou believe the tale that is fast spreading out of Bethany ?

STRANGER [*gravely*]. About a certain Lazarus who died and was recalled ?

MIRIAM. I think that was his name. It matters little.

STRANGER. 'Tis not a question of belief. I know it to be true.

MIRIAM [*incredulous*]. Thou knowest it? Hast thou a proof? Dost thou know one who saw it?

STRANGER. I am sister to him who was summoned back to life. Mary am I — called the Magdalen.

MIRIAM [*in amazement*]. Thou — the dead man's sister? Thou? And was he truly dead?

MARY. Would there be a doubt in thine own mind if it were Esther? Or if thou hadst sat beside thy father's couch till life had flown? Hadst thou seen the winding bands — the tomb of my dead brother — thou wouldst have been sure that death had come.

MIRIAM. Please forgive my thoughtless question. It should never have been asked. Tell me [*drawing her nearer the divan*] was the Wonder-Worker there?

MARY. The Master? Nay! Too late we sent for Him and four long days were passed before He came. I said to Him, "Hadst Thou been here, my brother had not died." So great was my sorrow, I knew not what I said.

MIRIAM [*in an awed tone*]. Didst thou speak like that? And then?

MARY. We all went to the tomb. The Master said to Lazarus, "Come forth!" The stone was moved; the dead walked out — and now my brother liveth.

MIRIAM. A dead man come to life! Who is this Nazarene Whom some so love and some so hate?

MARY. He it is Whom God hath sent to save a fallen people. He it is Whom God hath promised Israel.

MIRIAM. He? The Nazarene? The Promised one of Israel? — Thou hast seen Him — talked with Him?

MARY. Hour upon hour have I hearkened to His words.

MIRIAM [*dreamily*]. Promised One of Israel. I had hoped that He had not come yet — not quite so soon.

MARY. Is there in the land a maid who hath not hoped the same ? Who would not give even life itself to be His mother ? But hadst thou known Mary — though thy heart were full of envy — it would soften to a love most ardent.

MIRIAM. I knew I did not merit such honor. Never did I speak such thoughts before. Yet I could not bring myself to throw away all hope of that high privilege.

MARY. What meanest thou, my child ? Thou speakest strangely.

MIRIAM. 'Tis a secret. One I never even dreamed of telling. But since I know the Promised One of Juda is among us, an awful load is lifted from my heart. I feel a joy — another kind of hope.

MARY. Tell me thy secret, Miriam.

MIRIAM. I loved — I love — an officer of Pilate's court — a Roman. My father is a man who reads the law and one who never would consent to take a Gentile in his home. Nay, like all Jewish women, I shall bow for life, to one who pays a fitting price — whom mayhap I despise. So I had planned to leave it all and fly to Rome. Yet be not harsh in judging me; love such as mine may never have disturbed thy tranquil life. But one restraining thought kept haunting me. The Promised One of Israel would not be born of one whose husband was a Gentile.

MARY [*softly*]. Art thou disappointed ?

MIRIAM. Nay, Mary. I have said I am not worthy. Yet dost thou think this Promised One Who healeth

body pains and raiseth dead, can heal a suffering heart? Dost think He would condemn me if I loved one of another race — yet truer — nobler than the sons of Israel?

MARY. He pardoned me who had transgressed most grievously. I had a Jewish husband and I left him for a pagan. That sin was great though God knows how I wanted to repair it. Yet how my people spurned me, how they sneered, and stepped aside! To them I was "The Sinner," and hating and defiant, I resolved to play the part. . . And then He came. I knew that He had power over hearts. I saw Him heal the blind, the deaf, the lame, and knew myself more wretched than them all. So at His feet I threw myself and washed them with my tears. He spake — and startled those about — for He rebuked me not.

MIRIAM [*breathless*]. What did He say?

MARY. Just this: "Thy sins — they are forgiven thee."

MIRIAM [*in amazement*]. Sins are not for men to put aside. Such words belong to God.

MARY. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is God — the Son of God.

MIRIAM. Hush, Mary! lest my father overhear! What hast thou said?

MARY. Who else can raise the dead to life? Do Satan's servants bring back sight? And would his minions drive seven devils out of me? How canst thou doubt?

MIRIAM. In thee were seven devils?

MARY. It is the truth. Yet now my house is free. He is the very Son of God.

MIRIAM [*in reverent awe*]. A God! And He forgave thy sins?

MARY [*with assurance*]. Aye. God indeed. But not the God of thunder and of mountain tops. He is the God of love.

MIRIAM. But does He talk like common men? I mean were I to seek Him, would He tell me what to do?

MARY. Aye, if thy faith be firm. [*A woman comes to the door at right, but seeing the two talking, draws back. She remains concealed in the curtains, unnoticed.*]

MIRIAM. And would He be angry if I asked about the Roman?

MARY. His is not the harsh and loveless doctrine of our people. Even the Samaritans, He said, we are to love. Further He hath prophesied that Juda will reject Him — that the Gentiles are to be His people.

MIRIAM [*pleadingly*]. Take me to Him, Mary. There is much that I would ask of Him. Wouldst thou not do that for me?

MARY. All the world would I take there, and thee above all others. Thou shalt see the Son of God, and in our house in Bethany — with Lazarus and Martha and myself. [*Becoming serious.*] But . . .

MIRIAM [*fearfully*]. But what?

MARY. Something overshadows Him. Danger hangs overhead. Though He is more powerful than things, and kings, and demons — something which we do not understand is lurking near. Wilt thou help Him if He be in need?

MIRIAM. I? I — help the Promised One? I — help a God? How could creature such as I, help Him?

If I can give anything — yea life — it shall be His. [*Meditatively.*] I can say the same for Varrus when he learns these things.

MARY. Varrus is thy friend the Roman?

MIRIAM. Thou hast guessed it well. 'Twould be a fault to tell me many secrets. This was hid deep in my heart so long that it is crying for the light of day.

MARY. I hope I may be worthy of thy trust. [*Rising.*] Worthy and able to assist thee. I should have left long ere this. The afternoon is spent. Give thy little sister my farewell.

MIRIAM. My little princess will be grieved when she finds thou art gone. But I shall tell her thou hast other little ones to talk to. [*Miriam walks to the door at left with Mary.*] Thou hast brought a joy untold into a lonely heart. This Pasch I will eat with heart o'erflowing. [*Calling the servant.*] Lora!

MARY. I shall return to thee. [*Lora enters and bows to the visitor.*] Farewell! my dear. May God send blessings on thee!

MIRIAM. Farewell! God's blessing speed thee! [*Lora precedes Mary as they go out.*]

[*Rhea, the woman who drew back into the curtains just previously, enters from right. She is Jobal's second wife — young and beautiful — with a furtive eye and a weary, languid manner.*]

RHEA. Why is Esther looking for fine clothes? It seems thou hadst a guest.

MIRIAM. Didst thou not know our little one was lost? My guest was the good woman who came back with her.

RHEA. And did she leave her name ?

MIRIAM. 'Twas Mary — come from Magdala.

RHEA. From Magdala ! [*Feigning surprise.*] Is that name strange to thee ? Thou art not too discerning in thy tastes.

MIRIAM [*comprehendingly*]. What meanest thou ?

RHEA. It matters not. Yet ever since the Nazarene dispersed her devils, hath she dogged His footsteps. That He tolerates her presence proves what kind He is.

MIRIAM [*hotly*]. What need hast thou to speak so of my friends ?

RHEA. Thy friends ? Ha ! Ha ! Since when hath Jobal's daughter joined the rabble of the Prophet ?

MIRIAM [*her anger rising*]. My eyes have never seen this Wonder-Worker. But do thou keep within thyself, thy base insinuations of a man Who is so good. The Nazarene is what He claims to be.

[*Lora enters from left, and stands as if to speak.*]

RHEA [*to Miriam*]. We shall discuss that later. [*To Lora.*] What dost thou want — thou ever-curious of what is passing ?

LORA [*respectfully*]. My lady, Phanuel, the son of Sama, seeketh Jobal.

RHEA [*looking at the servant intently and paling a little*]. Thou hast the name aright ? I know that name too well.

LORA. 'Twas that he said. I left him in the courtyard down below.

RHEA. Bid him come up [*nervously looking off right*] while I look for the master. Let not thy manners, Miriam, detain thee here too long. [*Appraising her-*

self hurriedly.] I must prepare to meet him. 'Twere impossible like this. [*Lora goes out left front: Rhea goes out right.*]

MIRIAM [*to herself*]. Why should I stay to meet this man? Why should I spoil the feast which until now has brought such happiness? [*She rises and goes towards the door at right but is stopped by the voice of the newcomer.*]

PHANUEL [*Entering from left front — a young Jew whose costume indicates a good family. He is heavily built and wears the phylacteries on his left arm. He is perfectly self-possessed and beneath his sparse beard there is a chin which denotes unrelenting determination.*] Blessings on the house of Jobal! I would see its master.

MIRIAM [*turning reluctantly*]. Thou hast our humble welcome. If thou wilt sit a moment I shall go to call my father.

PHANUEL [*brightening*]. 'Tis Miriam. I thought thou wert a servant. So all my blessings are for thee instead. What need have crude old stones of pleasant speeches when youth and beauty dwell within the courts?

MIRIAM. Thy words come without effort. [*Indifferently.*] My father will enjoy them. [*Turning towards the door.*] I know he will prefer to talk out here.

PHANUEL. Wherever thou shalt be, I deem far better. Thou seem'st in some unnecessary haste.

MIRIAM [*coolly*]. My father doth not know I speak with thee. Nor do I care to ask him if I may.

PHANUEL [*pretending an aggrieved air*]. 'Tis said

that some fair creatures have no hearts, and 'tis said truly. [*Carelessly.*] But after I ask Jobal for thy hand, thou shalt not be so bold, for in the customs of our noble race, thy petty whims are not to be considered. Besides I know my suit is favored in thy father's eyes.

MIRIAM [*turning full upon him*]. Phanuel! How canst thou do me such a great injustice? Spare me, please, a quarrel with my father. Such a step will bring results unbearable to both of us. If I wed a man I do not love, my life will be a torture to the grave. Think of thine own happiness if mine concerns thee not.

PHANUEL. Coquetting, like the other queenly arts, becomes thee well. But I am not deceived. My mind is set. Thee I desire — thee alone.

MIRIAM [*going over to him and wringing her hands before him*]. Phanuel, I beg of thee. Think well before thou dost this thing. This one request I make of thee — the closest to my heart. . .

RHEA [*entering and overhearing the last part of the conversation*]. Miriam, what doth this mean? Canst thou explain thine actions? Go down into the house at once, thou girl of wanton tongue. And I apologize to thee, my guest. The master of the house will be here shortly. [*Miriam hastily draws away from Phanuel, and indignantly brushes past her step-mother, going off right front.*] Thou art a stranger, but thy ways will ever be familiar.

PHANUEL. The pink of youth hath never left thee — nor the green of envy.

RHEA [*smiling sadly*]. Call it not that, Phanuel. 'Tis but responsibility I feel for Jobal's daughter.

PHANUEL. Thou art too strict — with others. Least of all shouldst *thou* be angered by my foolish sayings.

RHEA. Thou speakest truly, Phanuel. The tongue is thy great failing.

PHANUEL. Though one to whom I spoke replied unkindly.

RHEA. Hast thou not pardoned that?

PHANUEL [*curtly*]. I came not to discuss the past. I came for Jobal's help.

RHEA [*to herself*]. If I but had that past again! [*To Phanuel.*] What wouldst thou that I do for thee? Perhaps I can amend it.

PHANUEL. Perhaps thou wouldst not care to — but thou art strange to-day. Who knows! [*Coming out of his reverie.*] This day have I been honored. Caiphas hath chosen me to capture a disturber of the peace. But there is danger — or at least the fear that Pilate will not let our Temple guards go armed throughout the city.

RHEA. And Jobal is to answer this objection?

PHANUEL. It sounds absurd to put it thus — but that is what I seek.

RHEA [*ironically*]. Will Jobal overawe the man whom Caiphas dares not approach?

PHANUEL. 'Tis not a question for the Procurator. To see him is to wake a sleeping lion. A certain Varrus leads the troops within the walls tonight. If he were told we meant no harm, might he not let us pass?

RHEA [*sharply*]. Varrus? I have heard that name. Doth Jobal know the man?

PHANUEL [*slyly*]. I have seen the two together. If they confer again — for me — I keep my peace forever. If not, the world will know that Jobal hath been seen with Romans.

RHEA. Is Jobal then, the pawn thy scheming needeth ?

PHANUEL [*with angry irony*]. Thou art too loyal to thy lord. 'Twere rash for me to ask thee. Perhaps I can arrange without thy help.

RHEA. Nay — give me a chance to help thee. Let me make amends — But hush ! — I hear old Jobal shuffling hither.

JOBAL [*entering from right*]. Blessed be the son of Sama, who doth light my house.

PHANUEL [*bowing*]. Be thou also blessed, my lord. I thank thee for thy welcome.

JOBAL [*indicating a seat for his guest*]. Business of state hath brought thee here ?

PHANUEL [*sitting at his ease; Rhea moves as if to go*]. Business of more moment than my life. My words speak the rise or fall of Israel. Thy good wife may hear them if thou will'st. 'Twould do no harm if prudent women knew such weighty things. They wield no little power.

JOBAL [*turning to Rhea and motioning her to a seat*]. Sit by us, Rhea. It is as he saith. Strange, too, my first wife had no care for business.

PHANUEL [*very solemnly*]. The priests will take the Nazarene before the feast is passed.

JOBAL [*darkly*]. And time it is. With Him about the land is cursed by God. Contagion follows on His wanderings.

PHANUEL [*after a pause*]. Caiphas hath chosen me to bring Him to the Council.

JOBAL. A prudent choice. This time it shall be done.

PHANUEL [*knowingly*]. But Rome may interfere; she may misread our actions. Armed troops make mighty Rome uneasy. A word from one whom Rome respects — a word from thee — might save me.

JOBAL [*staring at him*]. Am I to go to Pilate?

PHANUEL [*in a soothing tone*]. No! No! That would be folly. . . A simple leader of the troops would suit our purpose better. . . The man to see is Varrus.

JOBAL [*losing control of himself*]. Varrus? Varrus? Didst thou say that I should go to Varrus? That name must not be mentioned in my house. I would not stoop to speak to Varrus.

PHANUEL [*still unruffled*]. But ere now thou hast talked with him. 'Tis known at least to me. Strange, now, thou canst not talk to him about thy nation's welfare. I am too young to represent the interests of the state, while Sanhedrists stand shivering with fear. Scowl not; I speak the truth. Terror hath not palsied thee — at least I thought not.

JOBAL. I? I — afraid of Romans? Gentile troops? I would not bend to ask their kind a favor.

PHANUEL [*sitting forward and looking intently at Jobal*]. We needs must feign to bend if we would win great things from Rome, unless thou hast some petty strife which stands before thy nation.

RHEA [*ardently*]. He shall not say such things of thee, my lord. Bid him to cease. Rome listens to thy

voice — and Rome will know there is no thought of plot if thou wilt only intercede.

JOBAL [*hesitating*]. Is there not another man in Juda ? Thou dost not know how I hate this man.

PHANUEL [*again sitting back composedly*]. None so brave and none so influential — if our nation comes before thy whims.

RHEA [*angrily to Jobal, indicating Phanuel with a scornful glance*]. Bid him cease, my lord. A firm reply will silence him. Thou shalt see the Roman.

JOBAL [*slowly*]. What thou hast asked shall be performed. I will see the man in charge . . . Passage of the city for a band of Temple soldiers ?

PHANUEL. Yea, that. It must be done this very day. We capture Him to-night and march Him from the slopes of Olivet through Ophel and the valley of the Millo, to the house of Annas and the High Priest. Thy skill will bring us past the grim Antonia. My gratitude — to both of you — will never die. [*He rises.*]

JOBAL [*rising*]. May God protect thine enterprise and may His Peace be on thee ! My years will pardon me from going down into the court with thee.

PHANUEL. Yea, I respect thy silver locks, when nations bow before them. [*Going towards the door.*] God's Peace be on thee !

JOBAL. Success attend thee ! [*Phanuel goes off front at left; Jobal at right.*]

RHEA [*makes sure that her husband has gone and rushes to the opposite door*]. Phanuel ! Why must thou rush right out ? A year hath passed since we have met — and oft it seems a lifetime.

PHANUEL [*returning somewhat reluctantly*]. I owe thee much for what thou hast just done.

RHEA. That may be true, but I do owe thee more, because I cast thy love aside when thou didst place it at my feet. But I have paid. — I have been punished, Phanuel, by this — my choice. Hast thou — hast thou forgotten me entirely ?

PHANUEL [*matter of fact*]. I had no choice. I offered all to thee; thou didst refuse me. Thou sawest only Jobal with his money-bags and fame. Thy father took the blame but 'twas thine own desire. Thou must abide by it.

RHEA. Dost thou believe I cared for aught but thee ? Bereft of reason for a time I made that fatal choice. But since then I have had time to repent. My life is torture with this righteous miser.

PHANUEL [*coldly*]. Must I now weep in sympathy ? [*With emotion.*] Wilt thou believe I too at one time suffered — suffered more than others dreamed — more than I can tell . . . That is gone. Thy turn hath come.

RHEA [*putting her hand on his arm*]. Phanuel, thou dost not understand. I want not sympathy. I ask thy pardon. I want to make amends. I only ask that thou wilt take me now.

PHANUEL [*looking at the hand on his arm*]. 'Tis only now that that thou dost turn to me ? Thou art too late; thou art now married. Let those who thwart my plans be warned in thee.

RHEA [*wincing at his bluntness*]. Aye ! Married ! Shackled with a yoke I cannot bear much longer. [*Furtively.*] Nor will I. One of us must leave to

free the other and Jobal's years hang heavy on his hands. My lord might die at any time — [*with meaning*] — my lord might die to-morrow. The fortune I have learned to hate will then be thine — an opportunity for all thy talents.

PHANUEL. A loyal wife thou art indeed. Thy lord might die to-morrow. And what would save me on the day succeeding ?

RHEA. Art thou contented only when thy words cut to the quick ? Nature cries out only under torture — I am tortured now. Do women cast aside the ones they love ? Why did I urge my husband to bow down before the Roman, if not for thee and thine ambitious schemings ? [*Looking away.*] Daily have I suffered here and hoped for thy return. [*Turning to him.*] Thou hast come by accident; go not without me — or without a promise — that something left of hope and love may bear me through the darkness.

PHANUEL. Rhea, talk like that is dangerous in Jobal's house. It would have been music to my ears — even when thou mad'st that hateful choice — so much I loved thee. Were thy plans most daring in the world, I'd have agreed. Not so now. Something hath been changed inside. While the wife of Jobal is a memory and no more — I have found his daughter a reality. Miriam hath captivated me.

RHEA [*violently*]. Miriam ! Miriam ? She hath torn thee from me ? Little did I know a viper lived within my bosom. [*Pause.*] And I am to make a fool of Jobal for thy schemings ? Ha ! Must I be trampled on and never have revenge ? Have a care ! My cup

is full. Revenge! Revenge, the sweetest in the world shall fall upon thee.

PHANUEL. Rhea, tell me where am I to blame.

RHEA. I care not where blame be found. Yet — if thou weddest Miriam, for all that Jobal thinks of thee, it is that thou art cleverer than I. [*Pausing and speaking deliberately and with marked emphasis.*] Rather would I see her with a Gentile for a husband. Phanuel — I have a scheme to crush thee.

PHANUEL. Art thou fair, Rhea? Art thou reasonable?

RHEA. Fair to thee? Reasonable? Why should I be fair? I have suffered more than man or woman can endure. Thine own words have marked a breaking point. Miriam — my husband's child — the one I least suspected. But thy words were said and well I heard them. . . 'Tis over. We have finished speaking. Go!

PHANUEL [*pained*]. Rhea, it is most unfair to send a man away like this.

RHEA [*her anger at white heat — calm in its intensity*]. Thou shalt be sent no other way, nor shall I keep thee here. Wilt thou begone or shall I call my husband?

[*Miriam appears at the balcony, right front; seeing the two she stops short.*]

PHANUEL. Here is she who brightens up the morning. [*To Miriam.*] Beware of what this woman says of me. I love but thee and never cared for her.

MIRIAM [*ignoring his remark and addressing both of them*]. I humbly ask thy pardon. [*To Phanuel.*] My father said that thou hadst left ere this.

PHANUEL. I take my leave. [*Going towards the door.*] And may the peace of God rest on the daughter of this house — His mercy on its lady.

MIRIAM. His peace will stay until intruders come to drive it out.

[*Phanuel departs indignantly.*]

RHEA. No peace will fall where that base creature is. [*To Miriam.*] And thou art careless to a fault, eavesdropper.

MIRIAM. My father told me that his guest had gone. Am I not free to seek a breath of air upon the roof without thy taunts — thy never-ending carpings?

RHEA. Thou art free now, but 'twill not be for long. [*With icy irony.*] This noble Jew is asking for thy hand.

MIRIAM. And thou wilt aid his cause — so great a hate thou bearest me. Ah, Rhea! Spare me this. No more than this I ask thee.

RHEA. Much hast thou distressed me — but though thou wert the devil's child, Phanuel would be unworthy of thee. Sit, my child. I have a strange thing to discuss between us. I would speak with thee of something pleasant.

MIRIAM [*brightening*]. Wilt thou help me, Rhea? Really, help me?

RHEA [*curtly*]. Who is Varrus of the Roman host?

MIRIAM [*embarrassed*]. Varrus — Varrus? What of him? What dost thou know of Varrus?

RHEA. Enough that I feel guilty in the presence of thy father. The Roman's boldness brought him here and be assured he had a fitting welcome.

MIRIAM [*tensely*]. Varrus spoke to father? About a month ago? Nay — twenty-seven days to be exact.

RHEA. Sometime then.

MIRIAM. That is why no word hath come. I feared I had offended him.

RHEA. The time hath come however when I must speak to Jobal. I thought it would be well to tell thee first.

MIRIAM [*crestfallen*]. I thought — I thought I heard thee say this was of something pleasant. It seems to have its bitterness.

RHEA. Less bitter than it might be, if thou wilt but hear me out. I hate this son of Sama with a hate beyond control, and when he asked thy hand it struck a horror to my heart. I found I loved thee all the time and wanted to protect thee. He claims thy father favors him, and well we know that woman's wish is given little thought. To show my honest love for thee — to keep thee from his hands — I plan to beg of Jobal that he let thee marry Varrus.

MIRIAM [*stupefied*]. Rhea!

RHEA. It is my way of begging thy forgiveness — to make up for the wrongs which I have done thee.

MIRIAM [*incredulous*]. But, Rhea, it can never be. My father would not think of it.

RHEA. When I have flung myself down at his feet, and begged him to forget for once the customs of the ancients, will he remain unmoved?

MIRIAM. Dost thou think he would listen even then?

RHEA. At least thy happiness is worth my trying.

MIRIAM. How can I speak my gratitude to thee?

Canst thou forgive my actions in the past ? I never knew how much thou cared for me.

RHEA. I seek no words of gratitude, my child. I too have known the suffering of unrequited love.

MIRIAM [*suddenly, as if struck by a new thought*]. Hast thou perchance been talking with the Nazarene ?

RHEA. The Wonder-Worker ? Dost thou think me mad ? Although this very day I spoke about Him. Why dost thou ask ?

MIRIAM. I did not mean to ask at all. I think queer things at times.

RHEA [*going towards the door at right*]. Thou art a queer child, Miriam. I go to find thy father. [*Goes off, right.*]

MIRIAM. Thou, Jesus out of Nazareth, art verily a God. Who else but One divine could read my thoughts ?

ESTHER [*entering from right*]. Hath the lady gone already, Miriam ?

MIRIAM. Oh ! Thou art charming, dearest, but too long hast thou been gone. She promised to return to visit thee.

ESTHER. Why, Miriam, I hurried.

MIRIAM. Hurried with the slow haste of a princess — a princess too thou art. I hear our father coming and he wants to be alone. Let us take a walk down by the wall.

ESTHER. Wilt thou tell of birds and flowers, Miriam ?

MIRIAM. Birds and flowers, thee and me, and God, my little one. All the things that bring joy in the world. [*Taking Esther's hand.*] Come, we must be off !

[*They go out, left.*] [*Rhea and Jobal enter from right. Rhea makes Jobal comfortable.*]

RHEA. Let me sit beside thee for a little while, my lord. Many troubles weigh upon my heart.

JOBAL [*kindly*]. On the eve of this great feast, thou shouldst be joyful — joyful. Think of all the triumphs of our nation.

RHEA [*sitting opposite him*]. So I should be joyful but the words thy guest spake troubled me.

JOBAL [*surprised*]. Phanuel ? What words spake he ?

RHEA. Not mere words. 'Twas more than that. I fear he uses thee to his advantage.

JOBAL [*carelessly*]. Thou art moved by groundless fear. What harm can this man do me ?

RHEA. Is there not a proverb written in the books of men that oftentimes our enemies appreciate our strength with keener insight than do we ?

JOBAL. Yes — often have I heard it said, but what bears this to Phanuel ?

RHEA. Only that thy power will be used for his advancement.

JOBAL [*angrily*]. In thine opinion, then, I beg for alms; perhaps I am a leper ?

RHEA. Thou hast no peer in Israel, my lord. Yet every knave who knows thy strength is borne aloft on it.

JOBAL [*uneasy*]. Thy talk annoys me. Wouldst thou have me break the word I gave him ? Did I not yield to him at thy request ?

RHEA. True, I wanted thee to see the Roman. Yet not for others — priest or simple Jew. I would have thee do it for thyself.

JOBAL. Caiphas but speaks the will of Annas. A charge from such a man, I honor highly.

RHEA [*scornfully*]. Caiphas and Annas would obey thee, if thou wert man enough to give them orders.

JOBAL [*resenting her manner*]. Little dost thou know the ways of Juda's men. Caiphas is careful. His office makes him leader. Pilate's presence makes us cling together.

RHEA [*her anger rising*]. Pilate too would whimper at thy feet if thou wouldst make a sign or speak a word.

JOBAL [*extending his hands in sign of hopelessness*]. How is this old man to do these things? Where dost thou behold this glowing strength?

RHEA [*softly*]. How art thou this very day to win thy cause with Varrus?

JOBAL [*showing a little embarrassment*]. Er — that — that I cannot say. I know not.

RHEA [*sharply*]. Phanuel knows; doubtless Annas too. Otherwise thou shouldst not have been asked.

JOBAL [*looking at her narrowly*]. What is thy meaning, woman?

RHEA [*leaning toward him*]. Two hostile nations share this city; one conquering — one conquered, but in spirit wild and free. They hate each other with a hate like that of untamed beasts, and they can only be controlled by one who has a grasp on both. I mean, there is one point of union, and I pray be not amazed to find it in thy hand. [*Pausing.*] Varrus loves thy daughter.

JOBAL [*drawing himself up in sudden amazement*]. Thou meanest Jobal's daughter should be married to

a Roman ? [*His voice quivers.*] Woman, thou art mad !

RHEA. 'Twould be the greatest happiness in life that thou couldst give her.

JOBAL. And what is life or happiness of hers beside my honor ?

RHEA. With all thy honor, Jobal, thou art second. Caiphas respects it not a whit. What of Herod's honor — yet he rules and none can question him. Thou shalt be above reproach. [*Deliberately.*] Thou shalt be the law.

JOBAL [*still very much excited*]. Woman, dost thou realize what thou sayest ? Jobal's daughter married to a Roman ?

RHEA. Who in thy mind is the equal of this branded Roman ?

JOBAL. Phanuel, the noble son of Sama.

RHEA [*scornfully*]. One who mocketh thee throughout the city. He can flatter thee with ease and kiss the ground before thee. Thou shalt pay for words like his, and he can give thy daughter nothing. Varrus on the other hand hath won her heart.

JOBAL [*rubbing his hands together*]. There is some truth in thy words but — no — the cost is far too great. It cannot be !

RHEA. Wilt thou make no sacrifice for Israel ?

JOBAL. The God of Israel asks goats and bullocks — never honor and respectability.

RHEA [*solemnly*]. Once it happened that the God of Israel called forth a single man to lift that yoke from off His people. The High Priest — a usurper — was a

failure. The Roman Procurator, a tyrant. To one man it was given to rebuild that people's fortunes. One man looked to honor and refused to hear His God.

JOBAL. Stop! Stop! I must have time to think. Next week, perhaps, my answer.

RHEA. Thy answer is immediate — within this very hour. A Roman waits, and so does all Judæa.

JOBAL [*slowly*]. It cannot be. [*Pause.*] I must refuse. It is — it is the law.

RHEA [*ominously*]. Thou hast refused — and hath betrayed Jerusalem to Nazareth. [*Looking heavenward.*] May God's great mercy shield thee! [*Scornfully.*] The Wonder-Worker hath an easy victory. That honor which was held so high is gone with thy surrender. [*Well marked.*] Thy daughter hath become a Nazarene!!

JOBAL [*coming to his feet*]. What sayest thou? My daughter — what? [*Shouting.*] O God! It cannot be. [*He looks wildly around; then speaks slowly and with deliberation.*] Go! Leave me, woman! I must fall beneath this blow alone. [*Rhea goes off right; Jobal stares before him.*] To think — that I am come to this! [*He ponders awhile and weighs the question in his mind.*] The name of Jobal will be dragged throughout the streets of Juda. The house which I have built will be the laughing-stock of Israel. [*He stops as if a new thought had taken possession of him.*] But if she were the Roman's I would be above disgrace. The Hand of God is pointing out that I must drive her from my house and give her to the Gentile. The price is great —

but I will be the Saviour of my people. Rhea! [*She appears at the doorway at right.*] Go write my bond. I give her to the Roman. Write whate'er thou shalt think best. I will not bow to this. [*Rhea smiles knowingly and goes off right; Jobal looks over the city.*] Israel shall read my name in all her books of law. Nay, I shall be law. [*He sits down as if in state, very erect and bows to an imaginary suppliant.*] Pilate, bring thy soldiers through Jerusalem if need be. Not within the Temple. Hear ye? Not within the Temple. [*He turns to the other side after waving away the imaginary Pilate.*] Caiphas, be careful of thy tithes and thine ablutions. One is watching thee who can remove thee. Be more careful, Sadducee! Thine attitude annoys me. [*A piece of parchment falls out of one of the compartments of the phylacteries on the floor in front of him. He stares at it dully.*] Is this a petition? [*He stoops and picks it up, reading it aloud.*] "Sanctify unto me every firstborn that openeth the womb among the children of Israel, of men as well as of beasts, for they are mine." [*He hesitates and speaks in a trembling, frightened manner.*] God Himself is sending me petitions. [*To an imaginary person.*] Miriam my child, thou wert a firstborn. [*Looking around.*] Ha! the Law means only men; what care hath law for women? Thou hast left me for the Galilean. Why shouldst thou withhold from me the mastery of Israel? Stand back! I repeat, why shouldst thou bar me?

RHEA [*enters with the bond in her hand and is astonished to find him talking to himself*]. My lord, be

not so loud. All Israel will know thy plans. The bond is drying. It awaits thy seal.

JOBAL [*still trembling and holding the scripture quotation in his hand, turns to Rhea, takes the bond which she offers him, and reads it*]. Thou dost all things well, my Rhea. [*Dully.*] Let me be alone! [*Rhea goes off right. He studies the bond and slowly shakes his head. Then he puts the scripture parchment on the table and looks at his seal which is suspended by a cord about his neck. He speaks in a hollow far-away voice.*] Must I give my daughter to a Roman? To strike my seal on words like these is striking dead my honor. [*Louder.*] But thou hast forced my hand — O God of Hosts — I must submit. [*With greedy eyes.*] And my reward is great for I shall lead a mighty people. [*Looking heavenwards.*] Even thou, my daughter, hast been stolen from my heart. I shall save thy Chosen ones against the Galilean! [*He strikes the document with vicious force and smiles exultantly.*]

CURTAIN

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ACT II

Scene: Quarters of Varrus, an officer in the army of Pilate, in the Fortress Antonia. A bare room with white stone walls and a high ceiling.
Right: A door opens out into an anteroom.
Left: A large closet built into the wall to contain armor, weapons, ensigns, and the like. This closet is separated from the room by rich hangings. This note alone adds color to the apartment.
Rear: The wall is plain but in each corner there is a bust of a prominent Roman. Near the wall in the centre is a pedestal which supports a lamp. Right and left corners front also have lamps similar to this one.
Left of Centre: A simple table faces the door diagonally. Behind it is a low backless chair. To the right of the table, almost in the very centre of the room, is another chair. A third is near the right wall between door and bust. On this table are parchment maps and documents, writing utensils, and a small lamp. All four lamps in the room are lighted.

Time: 8:00 P.M. *The evening of the Last Supper.*

AT RISE: *Oreb, a servant boy of Varrus, is polishing a sword at right. He looks at his handiwork admiringly and begins to play an imaginary adversary after the*

fashion of the Romans with their short swords. Varrus enters while Oreb is in the act of vanquishing his invisible enemy and he looks on with a smile of approval. As soon as Oreb becomes aware of the officer's presence, a frightened look creeps into his eyes, and Varrus' face grows stern. Varrus is a young and smooth-shaven soldier, handsome and of splendid physique. He places his helmet on the table before speaking.

VARRUS [*expressing neither pleasure nor displeasure*]. Art thou preparing now to lead a Roman legion ?

OREB [*hesitating*]. Er — I knew not, master, that thou hadst come in.

VARRUS [*with assumed dignity*]. I like thy soldier spirit, but I think it would be safer if thy weapons were less sharp. [*Drily, in contrast to the foregoing.*] The furniture and hangings would last longer. [*He sits down.*]

OREB [*smiling admiringly at his chief*]. That sword of thine *is* sharp — too sharp to-night.

VARRUS [*looking over his shoulder in surprise*]. Thou wouldst not rather arm me with a cudgel ?

OREB [*seriously*]. Nay, my master — but they are my people. Too often is there rioting at feasts !

VARRUS [*brusquely*]. I know not what will come with all these people in the city. They come from all the world to pray, and when they come their prayers go to their heads. [*Quietly.*] I cannot see how one so fair could come from such a people — one so good — so true.

OREB [*putting the sword aside*]. Whom dost thou speak of, master ?

VARRUS [*sharply and with signs of irritation*]. It matters not. I talk unto myself at times.

OREB [*very meekly*]. I ask thy pardon, master.

VARRUS [*looking at the boy and smiling slowly*]. Thou too art Jewish, Oreb. I might make two exceptions. What art thou scowling at ?

OREB. Why dost thou hate my people so, and treat *me* like a Roman ?

VARRUS. It is not hate, my boy. I find thy people good and true, but those who lead them are at times possessed of double tongues.

OREB [*defensively*]. We must obey our leaders, master.

VARRUS [*curtly*]. Yea ! So it seems ! Except thyself ! Thou hast to serve but me [*looking intently at the boy*] and that itself hath made thee half a Roman [*laughing*] as faithful and as trusty as my sword. — Do people question thee about my doings ?

OREB. 'Tis all I hear, my master. The priests ask me as well.

VARRUS. Dost thou tell them ?

OREB. Just that thou art silent in my presence — that when guests enter I am sent outside.

VARRUS. Thou art a good boy, Oreb. I should like to take thee with me.

OREB [*in genuine surprise*]. Like to take me with thee ? Dost thou leave Jerusalem ?

VARRUS. That I know not. Hast thou ever heard of Spain ?

OREB. Spain ! That must be far away. I never heard the name. Can it be as far away as Rome ?

VARRUS. Far away as Rome and far away as Rome

again. Far away from everything and everyone. Far away from Jewish mobs — and members of the Sanhedrin. Far away from hope and sorrow — far away from her.

OREB [*timidly*]. Wilt thou take me with thee, master?

VARRUS [*rousing himself from his reverie*]. Who said I was going? [*A cough is heard off stage.*] Someone waits without. [*Oreb hurries out: Varrus sighs and turns to his papers.*]

OREB [*entering almost immediately*]. There is a woman, master, who would see thee.

VARRUS [*not looking up*]. Another tale of woe about my soldiers. I cannot see her now. Tell her when the feast is passed I will be free. [*Oreb turns to go. Varrus looks up.*] Wait, boy! Is she Jewess?

OREB. I am not certain, master, but I think so. She is veiled.

VARRUS [*musingly*]. It could not be. [*Aloud.*] Nay, tell her what I told thee.

OREB. Yea, my master. [*He goes off.*]

MIRIAM [*very soon appearing in the doorway*]. Varrus!

VARRUS [*rising in amazement*]. Miriam! [*Going to her and kissing her.*] I thank the gods that I have seen thee once again before it was too late. [*Earnestly.*] But why hast thou come here? And all alone!

MIRIAM [*repulsing him in indication that she wants no delay*]. I had to come alone. My father follows. I come with news of very grave importance. [*Lowering her eyes and speaking more slowly as he steps*

back.] And too, to ask why thou wert gone so long ?

VARRUS. It was my love for thee which held me back, dear. [*Gloomily.*] Thy law is far too strict.

MIRIAM [*reproachfully*]. Did I dismiss thee ? Have I been unkind ?

VARRUS [*impatiently*]. How canst thou say such things ? I threw for sixes and I missed. I put my hopeless case before thy father.

MIRIAM [*tenderly*]. If thou hadst only told me.

VARRUS. And grieved thee so much more. [*Walking over towards the table where he fixes his eyes on the flickering lamp; Miriam follows listening.*] Back within the garrison I vowed I would forget thee, but there was such a darkness in my soul I could not stay. Day after day, night after night, I rode throughout the city and yet thou wouldst not go from out my mind. Each Jewish maiden startled me, for in her face I saw thy features; each venerable patriarch stirred my revengeful hatred — in him I saw the sanction of that ever-haunting law by which the conquerors are not deserving of the conquered; the very urchins in the street were symbols of a nation which rode straight-laced upon a loveless law — the law which slowly maddened me. And thou wert everywhere — in all I did and thought and said — I have applied to go to Spain — a soldier of the legion — and only Pilate's wishes have delayed me.

MIRIAM [*horrified at his last words, steps nearer to him*]. To Spain ? — Why Varrus ! — More than Pilate needs thee.

VARRUS [*looking at her intently*]. Then thou wilt join

me? [*He grasps her arm in amazement.*] Thou wilt go far away with me? To Rome? [*Pleadingly.*] It is our only chance. No longer can I live in this cursed country. [*She makes a sign of protest but he rushes on.*] What stands between us now? Who is this Promised One whom thou hast talked of? If he be but a rival, then I beg to meet him fairly. I fear no rival in the world — unless — unless —

MIRIAM [*drawing back*]. Unless — what?

VARRUS [*falteringly*]. Unless — thou — lovest him.

MIRIAM [*breaking from his grasp with impatience*]. Wilt thou but hear me out? My father cometh. There is no need for us to fly to Rome. The Promised One hath never been thy rival. 'Tis He who brought me to thee now. Do as I say. There is no time to lose.

VARRUS. What dost thou mean? What is thy word? I pledge myself to follow.

MIRIAM. My father needs thy help this very night.

VARRUS [*darkly*]. Thy father owes me much, and by the gods, I pay my debts.

MIRIAM [*pained*]. Thou wilt not help him?

VARRUS. I have pledged. It shall be as thou sayest. What am I to do?

MIRIAM. He is afraid thy men will interfere with our great feast. I know no more than that. Our leaders are afraid to go to Pilate.

VARRUS [*troubled*]. I have no authority in matters of the state. The Procurator would resent my meddling. I fear thy father has some deep-laid scheme.

MIRIAM [*in genuine disappointment*]. And are Pilate's glowers more to thee than all my love? Time is fly-

ing, Varrus. Hurry! Wilt thou grant my wish?

VARRUS [*ardently*]. Thou art first in all the world — but where doth this concern thee? Thou art a pawn for Caiphas that he may check Rome's power.

MIRIAM [*in angry impatience*]. All this time is wasted ere I tell thee what I came for. If thou wilt grant my father's wish to-night, whatever thou shalt ask for, he will give thee under bond.

VARRUS [*staring at her and slowly comprehending*]. Thou dost not mean . . .

MIRIAM [*enthusiastically*]. Of course I mean — myself. What have I come for? [*Varrus takes her in his arms and kisses her, and for a moment she forgets her hurry. Oreb appears in the doorway at right.*]

OREB. Master, there is . . . [*Looking at the two.*] Oh! I beg thy pardon!

VARRUS [*looking up somewhat embarrassed but smiling at the boy*]. And I am forced to grant it. [*Still holding Miriam in his arms.*] But I wish thou sometimes did what thou hast told the priests. What is thy message?

OREB. Sir, a man awaits thee on affairs of high importance. 'Tis Jobal of the Sanhedrin.

MIRIAM. Father! Quick! What shall I do? [*She is terrified.*]

VARRUS [*looking around the room*]. Jobal! Quick! What shalt thou do? There's but one door to this room.

MIRIAM [*seeing the curtain*]. Let me hide in there. Let me go somewhere.

VARRUS. No! Thou must be out of here. [*To Oreb.*] Get my dress cloak! [*Oreb hurries to the*

curtained closet and returns with a long sweeping cloak: To Oreb as he puts it on.] Show him in! [*Oreb goes off: Varrus takes Miriam by the hand and goes towards the door.*] Oreb will take care of thee once thou hast left the room.

MIRIAM [*hushed but excited*]. But thou wilt do whate'er my father wishes? Promise now! Each single thing!

VARRUS [*taking his stand at the rearmost side of the door and putting Miriam in back of him*]. Yea! by all the gods of Rome, and by my love for thee I promise.

MIRIAM [*in little more than a whisper*]. By the Nazarene?

VARRUS [*surprised*]. Yea — and by the Nazarene. Be still! Thy father cometh. [*Jobal comes to the door and Varrus grandiosely extends the end of his cloak in a gesture indicating the centre of the room. The cloak completely hides the girl.*] Rome's favor be upon thee, friend! To my poor chamber thou art always welcome.

JOBAL [*in undisguised surprise*]. God's peace be on thee—if a soldier cares for peace. Thy welcome takes me by surprise.

VARRUS [*stepping up beside Jobal who has come inside the door, and allowing Miriam to slip out.*] Circumstances alter even welcomes! [*He walks over to the table taking care to occupy Jobal on the way.*] I might have greeted thee as last we parted, but people bury hatreds on great feast days — days when all the gods seem to be smiling.

JOBAL [*sitting in the seat indicated by his host*]. For-

giveness hath not been a Roman virtue — yet some great Romans seem to have acquired it.

VARRUS [*with subtle irony*]. Even so. I am ashamed to entertain a guest. Pilate with his gorgeous rooms and servants is the man to seek for hospitality.

JOBAL [*scowling*]. The governor is very hard to talk to. I come not after tapestries and servants. I seek a man who has command of soldiers.

VARRUS. Pilate is thy man. He is my chief.

JOBAL. Yea. Romans all talk nobly. But even Jews can see that notwithstanding rank or title, the man who is the idol of his soldiers is supreme.

VARRUS Didst thou come to tell me that? Is this thy weighty business?

JOBAL. Nay, I have more to say, sir. Hear me out! The ruling men of mighty Rome have always given freedom of religion to their captives, have they not?

VARRUS [*exasperated*]. Come to the point. Thou knowest well the answer to thy question. Rome buildeth empires; what cares she for thy religious brawls?

JOBAL. Thou canst not disagree — but Romans never grant that Jews can speak the truth.

VARRUS [*impatiently*]. My time is short. The feast may need me in the streets — though not to pray. Be brief.

JOBAL [*motioning to him to be calm and sitting forward in his seat*]. There is among us one who threatens to tear down our Temple. [*Mutteringly.*] He claims to be a Jew, but scorns all law.

VARRUS. In Rome we have a cure for such. We call them anarchists.

JOBAL [*seizing the opening*]. And so have we. But Pilate is so groundlessly affrighted, whene'er our Temple guards go through the city, that this time, too, he may prevent the cure.

VARRUS [*with Roman pride*]. Ha! Dost thou blame the Procurator for not trusting Jews?

JOBAL. I came not to explain the past. I only ask that in the name of Rome thou wilt not stop our little band which goes to take this malefactor in an hour or two.

VARRUS [*feigning understanding*]. I understand. I am to bring this plea of thine to Pilate.

JOBAL [*becoming excited*]. That would be folly. Pilate would declare the thing a plot.

VARRUS. I see. [*With sarcasm.*] But I would not. I harbor no suspicions.

JOBAL [*rising and coming towards Varrus*]. Hark to me a moment, Roman! Near the time of last full moon, thou hadst some words with me. Thy request seemed very strange, but I have thought well on it. Now if my request sounds good to thee, that which is as breath of life to my old age I give thee. Mark well, Roman! This is not an ordinary gift!

VARRUS [*restraining his enthusiasm with an effort*]. Dost thou bribe me, friend?

JOBAL. Bribe thee? [*Looking around hopelessly.*] And the Romans call my people sticklers! What concern is it to Rome if our feast please the Lord? What concern is it of thine if we imprison one who would disturb us? Yet it makes such a difference to my people that I will give to thee the greatest treasure of my life — if thou wilt aid us.

VARRUS [*at the same time anxious and suspicious*]. Thy reasoning is true — thy offer noble. [*Pointing at Jobal.*] When morning comes, thou wilt deny thy promise.

JOBAL [*taking a piece of parchment from his girdle and offering it to Varrus*]. Ha ! More mistrust. Then hear my bond, since only men of Rome can tell the truth. [*He takes it back, reading it aloud.*] "If thou wilt let a force of Jews — light armed — go through the city, before the dawn this fourteenth day of Nisan, thou mayest take to wife, one Miriam of Jobal's house. The terms hereof must not be known to her."

VARRUS. 'Tis legal and 'tis clear. [*Taking it and examining it.*] But why may not the terms be known to Miriam ?

JOBAL [*slyly*]. Wouldst thou inform thy wife that thou hadst bought her ? Wouldst tell her what a paltry sum she cost ?

VARRUS [*convinced*]. Let it remain. Still I am troubled with misgivings. Upon this parchment is my trust. Still canst thou not evade my grasp and blacken my good name before my leaders ?

JOBAL. Thy words a noble heart have wounded. To brand me with deceit is more than I expected. Thine is the bond — mine the only signature. Roman cautiousness hath blinded thee.

VARRUS. It would be safer had there been a witness.

JOBAL [*indifferently*]. Bring thy witnesses — whoe'er thou wilt.

VARRUS [*calling*]. Oreb !

OREB [*appearing in the doorway*]. Yes, my master !

VARRUS. Bid my captain Guala come to me.

OREB. He hath ridden with his troops already, sir.

VARRUS. Titus too hath gone ?

OREB. He too, master.

VARRUS. Who is in the court — one who can read and sign his name ?

OREB. Two Jews wait to see thee — saying they have special business.

VARRUS. They will do. Bid them come in at once. [*Oreb goes out bowing.*]

JOBAL. I had rather they were Romans. Would it not be better ?

VARRUS. So that thou couldst swear it was a forgery. Be thou satisfied with these two Jews.

JOBAL. Oh not that ! I care not whom thou bringest. Jews will be too glad to do such service to their country. [*Oreb enters with Phanuel and Judas. The former bows to Varrus who does not rise. Judas makes no sign. Jobal stammers and turns pale. Oreb goes off.*]

VARRUS [*to Phanuel*]. Wert thou seeking me ?

PHANUEL [*very respectful*]. Yes, my lord, but we have come too early. I am put in charge of a small band of temple soldiers. If thou hadst acceded to the wishes of my friend [*bowing towards Jobal*] I am to acquaint thee with our plans.

VARRUS [*paying little attention to him*]. Thou art timely. Sign this bond in which are writ my terms.

JOBAL [*rising and stepping before Varrus who is holding out the bond*]. Hold ! This man ill suits thy purpose. He is not a neutral, but a bosom friend of mine.

VARRUS. Time is short. Do not delay me. [*Putting the bond on the desk with decision and offering a pen to Phanuel.*]

PHANUEL [*coolly*]. 'Twere well I read it first. [*Jobal hurries to the door looking out; Varrus takes one of his maps; Judas glumly watches the proceedings; Jobal hurries back to Varrus; Phanuel becomes livid.*]

JOBAL [*nervously*]. I think thy servant boy would have a word with thee outside.

VARRUS [*surprised*]. My serving boy hath sent for *me?* 'Tis strange, but I will go. [*Rises and starts for door; turns sharply.*] No tricks between you now! [*He goes off.*]

PHANUEL [*losing his customary self-control*]. Art thou mad? [*Shaking the parchment before Jobal's face and speaking in an excited but hushed voice.*] This cannot be! Where is thy reason, Jobal? If thou art in earnest I will strike the Roman dead. [*He draws a short sword from inside his tunic.*]

JOBAL [*his hands held up, palms open beseeching silence.*] Did I not fulfill my promise? Have I not done this for thee?

PHANUEL. But it is against the law. Hast thou forgotten God? Am I not more worthy of thy daughter?

JOBAL [*in despair*]. Match the Roman. Take my daughter. Only wait till this is done. Meet him in fair combat — but be quiet now — and sign.

PHANUEL. I will meet him fairly, Jobal. After he has helped us out, this [*pointing to the bond*] will go to Pilate. Let him then explain it to his chief. I will make so much of this that he will lose his

head. I know one young influential Roman who will pay well for this information. [*Varrus appears at the doorway; Phanuel hastily bends over the bond. Jobal looks about guiltily and wrings his hands.*]

VARRUS [*cuttingly*]. Is thy Jewish plot complete? [*To Phanuel.*] Has thy name a thousand letters? Thou wert writing there when I went out. Were ye Romans, I would take your treachery to task. With a race which thinks itself the only one on earth, one must follow out a different course.

PHANUEL [*with some of his former ease*]. Thou hast made a bargain. I was noting well its contents.

JOBAL [*quailing under Varrus' gaze*]. Someone called thy name, my lord. I thought it was the lad. [*Varrus still looks him through and Phanuel slips the folded bond in his tunic. Then he takes a parchment from the pile of maps and leisurely blows upon it as if drying the ink and folds it in the sight of all; then he places it on the table.*]

VARRUS. I refuse to meet thee with thy weapons. Finish with the business and begone.

JOBAL. I am finished. Israel will thank thee, noble Roman. [*Sadly.*] Only thou hast wronged me in thy judgment.

PHANUEL [*somewhat uncomfortably*]. I must get the soldiers and attend to other business. This man [*pointing to Judas*] can inform thee of our plans. [*Addressing Judas.*] Meet me where we planned before the hour. [*Joining Jobal and bowing to Varrus.*] Israel may thank thee, but I think thou shouldst thank Israel.

JOBAL. Peace be on thee, Roman. Thou hast gained in this transaction.

VARRUS. Have I gained? Or is it Jewish treachery? Keep that peace in deed which thou so freely talkest of. Trust me to fulfill the terms and to demand full payment. *Vale!* [*Jobal and Phanuel go off. Varrus walks over to the table and abstractedly puts the folded parchment in his girdle. Judas eyes him intently but he is silent. Varrus sits and motions Judas to a seat.*]

VARRUS [*more to himself than to Judas*]. It must be so.

JUDAS. Art thou he who leads the Roman soldiers? [*His voice is heavy and full.*]

VARRUS. I am. What hast thou to tell me?

JUDAS. Very little. I have told too many things ere now. Soon we march through Ophel to the dwelling of the High Priest. Let us pass.

VARRUS. Who art thou and whom art thou arresting? Thou hast told me nothing and thou callest it too much.

JUDAS. I am Judas called Iscariot. [*Smiling and seeking approval.*] And I help Judea take the Nazarene.

VARRUS [*lurching forward*]. Not the Wonder-Worker? Not the Prophet?

JUDAS [*a fearful gleam in his eyes*]. Art thou mad about Him like the others?

VARRUS. Nay, but there is good in one who speaks the truth as He doth. Tell me what His misdeeds are. Why do they capture Him?

JUDAS [*passionately*]. Canst thou call foul blasphemy a good? Misdeeds! Misdeeds? — Why, He lied to me — deceived me. Three years have I helped Him and He paid me not my hire.

VARRUS. Hadst thou set a price upon thy labors?

JUDAS. He has said, "The laborer is worthy of his hire." And He bade me follow Him three years ago while I was fishing. Never hath He given me my due.

VARRUS. Man, I understand thee not. They told me He was penniless — just a wandering preacher living on the alms of friends.

JUDAS [*rising in his seat*]. Penniless, they told thee? Why have I the purse to carry? Why am I the keeper of this empty money-bag? Ha! He planned to found a kingdom. Like a fool, I followed Him. And He put the money in my keeping. [*He pauses looking around furtively.*] Dost thou know the money that is poured into the Temple, into Herod's house, and off to Rome? — That is what He promised when He bade me hold the money. Not in words, but by His act. None among His friends could better manage all that wealth than I. [*There is a pathetic arrogance in the speaker.*]

VARRUS. Since He hath no wages for thee, He must go to Caiphas? What will come of that? Thinkest thou He will be forced to build a kingdom for thee? Caiphas is not concerned about thy grievance, fool. Why didst thou not simply leave the Prophet?

JUDAS. Leave Him? Never? Everywhere I go those eyes go with me. Eyes which pierce my very soul — which cry "Thou art untrue." Eyes of love — but

I would rather face the flames of hell than have them watch me. Leave Him? Not until I close those eyes.

VARRUS [*angrily*]. Why, thou hast no charge at all. Avarice and fear and guilty conscience on thy part bring a man without reproach to judgment. Thou art bringing suffering to a person who is guiltless.

JUDAS. Suffering? He is to die. Naught but blood will close those awful eyes! Even though I plucked them out, He would rub mud in their empty sockets and those eyes would stare at me again. Soft eyes kill me. I must make them hard and glazed and sightless — little staring lumps of ice — hard eyes of a dead man.

VARRUS [*his fingers grasping his sword*]. Dog! Will Caiphas pay thee thy wages?

JUDAS. Miserable wages! Thirty bits of silver is all that he will give me.

VARRUS [*leaping to his feet*]. Traitor! Thou shalt not betray Him. Ere thou dost this thing, my sword will run thee through. [*He unsheathes the weapon in an instant.*]

JUDAS [*in terror*]. No! No! No! I had to come to thee. The Galilean sent me.

VARRUS [*hesitating*]. Sent thee here? What dost thou mean? Speak the truth and quickly.

JUDAS. Scarce an hour past, He said, "One here will betray Me." Then He added, "Do the business quickly."

VARRUS. Dost thou call that sending thee? How my fingers itch to kill!

JUDAS. Long ago He said a lord once had an unjust

steward whom he was about to send away. — All was said for me, but those dull blocks will never know. — Neither could he dig nor beg and so he called the debtors, lessening the debts they owed his master. Then the lord commended him in that he had done wisely. Ah! it was for me He spoke, but they will never know.

VARRUS [*who has stepped back*]. Thou wouldst offer them His life — that thou too might do wisely?

JUDAS [*still trembling and watching the drawn sword*]. He has made me do the thing. 'Tis His will to die. That is why He came into Jerusalem. I am only serving Him by coming here to thee.

VARRUS [*uncomprehending*]. 'Tis His will to die? What art thou saying?

JUDAS. Aye. He thinks His Father has a kingdom for Him somewhere and He will be king when He is dead. 'Tis His will to die, I swear it. Let me grant that wish, for if He lives those eyes will kill me. Let me close those piercing eyes in blood.

VARRUS [*dropping the sword*]. Miriam! Am I to share in this?

JUDAS [*enviously*]. Thou art getting more than thirty pieces. I heard them say that thy reward was great.

VARRUS. Dog! I will not be compared to thee!

JUDAS [*cowering under the Roman's gaze but feeling now that no imminent death awaits him mutters to himself*]. He will die! He came to die! I have done my part. 'Tis time to look for Phanuel.

VARRUS [*paying no attention to him and walking over left*]. She never would have made me swear to this.

And yet, I cannot lose her now. The bond forbids my telling her. If I refuse this — she is lost forever. [*Repeating the words of Judas which he was hardly conscious of hearing.*] And He — will die! He came to die!

JUDAS [*as if he sees a phantom*]. The eyes are looking at me now. They know I came. They see me everywhere.

VARRUS [*catching the contagion*]. Then do they know that I am innocent. They know a Roman keeps his oath. [*Looking where Judas is looking and seeing nothing.*] Cease, thou fool! Eyes cannot see for miles through walls and darkness. [*Walking up and down.*] He shall not be killed for such as thee. And yet — I cannot break an oath — I cannot break one woman's heart.

JUDAS [*ominously*]. Unless they take Him now — this very night — the land will swim in blood. Let them through. [*Pleading.*] Then Caiphas will let me go.

VARRUS [*savagely*]. Let them kill a righteous man for thee, thou slinking coward? Rather will I order out my soldiers to protect Him.

JUDAS [*nearing the door*]. Then will He be silenced by a dagger. Juda hath decreed that one shall die to save the people. They fear Him too. The eyes look out on them.

VARRUS [*turning full on Judas*]. By the gods I see a way. Take Him to thy judgment hall. I shall clear the streets. Then my bond is filled and I can claim a just reward. Then to Pilate thou wilt have to take Him. Jewish priests have naught to say in things of life and death. Then will all my influence with Pi-

late come to save Him; and my soldiers to a man will guard His every move. He shall have a bodyguard of Romans, though it cost my standing in the army. [*He puts on his helmet and seizes his sword; pushes Judas out of his way and rushes out. Judas amazed, reels across the room.*]

JUDAS [*recovering his balance, approaches the table; looks at the papers on it; peeks into the closet where the arms are kept; comes back to the centre*]. It is done! [*Looks toward door; staggers in that direction for a few steps; stops as if thinking of something.*] If He closed His eyes it would be easier to kiss Him. [*He looks up and stiffens out in horror as if he sees a phantom. Again his glance sweeps the room and he acts like a man who is beset on all sides by demons.*] Those eyes! — [*He shudders, draws his cloak about him, and bolts from the room with a loud agonizing cry.*] Those eyes!

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene: A prison in the Fortress Antonia.
A massive stone wall cuts the stage horizontally. It continues indefinitely to the left, but in that part which is on stage there are three barred doors opening into three cells.
Right: A short flight of stone steps leads up to a landing before a heavy door opening out into a courtyard.
The right and left cells are in darkness; that in the middle has a light near the rear wall which casts some light on front of stage. In the middle cell, but over in a corner so that it is hardly visible to the audience, is a dirty pallet of straw which serves as a bed for the prisoner.
Save the lamp in the cell, there is no light in the prison except when the door at the head of the steps opens. Then the light of day enters as well as the shouting of the mob out in the court. When the door is closed it shuts out this clamor.
The effect of front of stage is that of a corridor extending much further to left than can be seen.
The cell doors (especially the one in the middle) although heavy are loosely fitted and rattle when they are shaken.

Time: 9.00 A.M. *Morning of Good Friday.*

AT RISE: *Varrus, in the middle cell, paces up and down before the narrow door. All is quiet. He leans against the door and lowers his head. He grips the bars and shakes them so they rattle horribly in the vault. Then there is a silence. The door at the head of the steps opens. Oreb enters, looks around cautiously; then closes the door, shutting out the tumult of a mob. He descends the steps; glances into the first cell; studies the figure at the door of the second, who, with the light at his back, is not easy to recognize. With mingled horror and uncertainty, he walks wide of the middle door and peers cautiously into the third cell. Then he returns to the middle one.*

OREB. Master !

VARRUS. Thou art true indeed to come down here. But how didst thou get by the guard ?

OREB. All the morning have I watched him — watched him like a cat. All Egyptians leave their posts and just now this one left the door to join in the commotion. But, my master — why art thou put here ?

VARRUS. By a trick — a foul one — but I grant 'tis clever. Late last night I rode to Ophel where I had some orders for my troops. On returning word was brought that Pilate wished to see me — that he was examining a prisoner in this dungeon, and that I should come without delay.

OREB [*excited*]. Was the Procurator here ?

VARRUS. When I entered eight Egyptian slaves — scum of mankind — overpowered me with clubs and threw me in this hole. Had there been a light I could have killed the herd of them. — Pilate was not here — nor

any Roman save that low-born officer who hopes to steal my place, Lamachus.

OREB. Did he tell thee why thou hadst been captured ?

VARRUS. He dismissed the half-dressed beasts when I was thrown in here. Then he struck a light and made profound apology. He said that he was sorry I had plotted with the enemies, sorry I had threatened Pilate's life; told me this was done to keep my treason from the soldiers; that my case would be adjudged to-night. By the gods, I could have killed him, but my sword was gone and I was faint from such a struggle, and the coward kept a goodly distance from the bars.

OREB [*frightened*]. Then the awful news I heard is true !

VARRUS. What, boy ? Tell me all thou knowest.

OREB. My best friend is now the page of Pilate. And he said the Jew who signed the paper yesterday came to Pilate with Lamachus, bringing word about a plot in which thou wert the leader. Thou hadst joined the Nazarene and wert to strike now for his kingdom. Many soldiers had already pledged their services. All the ruling Jews and Romans were to suffer death. Thou wouldst hold the Roman troops and aid the Nazarene.

VARRUS. Pilate listened to such talk as that ?

OREB. Pilate laughed, and said he trusted thee unto the stars; told them that Lamachus would bend the knee for this. Then they had a paper which, altho 'twas veiled in language, promised Jobal's daughter to the man who should permit the prophet to pass through the city in procession. This, my master, was

quite close to midnight. Word came that the Nazarene had reached the house of Caiphas and that all thy troops had let Him pass.

VARRUS. By the gods, they are a clever pair. What did Pilate say to this ?

OREB. He said he would send for thee that he might hear the truth.

VARRUS. Then . . . ?

OREB. They replied that thou hadst planned it thus. That thou hadst arranged for all emergency. Then they told him there was one way left to foil thy schemes. Caiphas must judge the Nazarene, while thou wert held in prison, and thy soldiers kept away. Else there would be revolution ere the night was past.

VARRUS [*passionately*]. Is my power broken ? Am I beaten ? I can fight their kind alone — if [*he looks at the bars*] — if I but once get out of here. [*He paces up and down before the door.*] Oreb, if a hell there be and in that hell a lowest depth, I — Varrus — fool in the sight of men and gods — will claim that place. To think that I should listen to their lies. To think that one so good as Miriam could be their pawn. What are they doing to the Nazarene ? What does He say ?

OREB. They question Him — and His reply is that He is the Son of God. And they have struck Him.

VARRUS. The Son of God ? — the Son of One who stands above the gods of Rome ? If that were true His Father would assist Him ! Why does He not let me die in His place ? He knows I would. Much rather would I mend my sin by dying for a guiltless man — or God, if such He be — than die a traitor at the

mercy of a scheming Jew. My gods have failed me. [*In prayer.*] Thou, great God of all — aye — Juda's God, Thou, Father of this Man I have delivered, I beg Thee free me. [*He is nearly exhausted from emotion, but still shakes the bars violently.*]

[*The door at the head of the steps opens bringing in a flood of light and the cries of the mob in the courtyard. They are somewhat confused and indistinct, but some phrases may be distinguished, viz.* —]

VOICES OF THE MOB. Barabbas !
Not him !
Away with this man !
Nay, the other !
Give us Barabbas !
Barabbas !
Away with Him — Barabbas !
[*etc.*]

[*The door shuts behind an old woman. She hesitates, blinking, on the landing, and then timidly creeps down the steps.*]

VARRUS [*after the door closes and Oreb has assured him by a nod that it is not the sentinel*]. What are those mad wolves howling for ?

OREB [*somewhat disturbed*]. Master, did it seem to thee, they called the name of Varrus ?

VARRUS. If my prayer were so soon heard, He is the Son of God. Willingly will I go forth — but I will not be silent. I will give them real sport for their killing.

OREB. Say not that, my master. Rome would never let thee go.

VARRUS. Rome may make me go — another route — for my own folly.

[*The old woman has peered into the empty cell at the right and now she is curiously staring at the two at the middle one.*]

WOMAN. Have ye seen my son ? [*To Varrus.*] Hast thou ?

VARRUS [*somewhat sharply because of the interruption*]. Thy son ? Who might he be ?

WOMAN. Heard ye not of Judas the Iscariot ? He was with the Master Who is out there suffering so. [*Weeping.*] Ah, the Master was so good to him ! I am afraid they took him prisoner too.

VARRUS [*like an enraged animal at the bars*]. Judas the Iscariot ? Thou askest have I seen him ?

WOMAN [*her lips quivering as she looks at him*]. Aye ! Where didst thou see him ?

VARRUS [*looking at her searchingly and controlling himself a little*]. Tell me first, art thou his mother ?

WOMAN. That I am — and growing old to come so many miles to see him. Tell me, have they done him any harm ?

VARRUS [*changing his tone as he looks at her*]. Was he ever good and kind and loyal to his Master ?

MOTHER OF JUDAS. That he was and he was brave — braver than a lion. Level-headed too, —— a head for money had my boy.

VARRUS [*tenderly*]. Woman, I have never met him. Truly I am sorry. If I ever cross his path — [*He pauses; a cold glint comes into his eyes but it softens almost immediately.*] — I will inform him of thy search.

MOTHER OF JUDAS. Help him, and befriend him if they put him in this hole — and I know the Master will take away thy bars. He hath power over all things — even over death. Help my boy and win a mother's blessing.

[*The door opens with its shaft of light and its indistinct but furious shouts. It is quickly closed. Mary Magdalen is on the landing.*]

MARY [*timorously coming down the steps*]. Canst tell me where I will find one Varrus? I was sent here by a slave, but *this* place is a prison.

OREB. This is Varrus, woman. Thou hast been directed rightly.

MARY [*in doubt*]. Art thou Varrus who commands the soldiers?

VARRUS [*his Roman pride mingled with a natural graciousness*]. I am Varrus and I *was* an officer of Pilate.

MARY [*hesitating and faltering*]. I have come to thee from Miriam — but she knows not — that thou art — in prison. I — am Mary — friend of Miriam — of Magdala.

VARRUS. May she never know that I am here. Where is she in all this wretched business? Speak thy wishes. Her friends need no further introduction.

MARY [*her voice almost in a whisper and without hope*]. She too has been seeking thee. We came to ask a favor. [*Looking around terrified and dazed.*] It is not to be. We ask too much. [*Varrus looks at her intently and she bursts out anew like someone suffering acutely.*] Pilate has commanded those foul beasts to scourge the Master; there is none to act in

his defence. Why art thou — our only hope — imprisoned in this place? [*Sobbing.*] O my God, Thou knowest best!

VARRUS [*reverently*]. With my life I would have helped, but those same Jews prepared a trap which I walked blindly into. Now I stand here helpless. Woman, it is due to my own orders that the Master reached the house of Caiphas.

MARY. Thine own order? [*She steps back.*] Thou sayest *thou* hast ordered it?

VARRUS. It is true. I have been tricked, though I would change places with Him readily.

MARY [*amazed*]. Yet this thing was done at thy command?

VARRUS. Upon my oath I promised Miriam that I would let them take Him — [*softly*] — neither of us knew what I had promised. When the scheme unfolded and I saw it was a trap my only thought was to release the Man Whom I had wronged. I knew that He would come to Pilate if they sought His life — and here — with Pilate, my word was a power. [*He pauses and sighs.*] They knew these things too. About my name a chain of lies and intrigue has been woven so black that Pilate must believe me mad. I, Varrus, in a Roman prison, am accused of treason and may not state my case until to-night.

MARY. All the power of hell is flung against us. Miriam has walked the streets all night — where'er the Master was — in search of thee. Had she only known! [*She turns away weeping.*] I must go back — for they are scourging Him. I left His Mother standing — standing, watching them.

Would that I were dead and He away from them! [*Oreb is open-mouthed; the old woman is wringing her hands in a corner; Varrus bows his head; Mary Magdalen walks towards the door.*] I saw them strike Him in the court of Caiphas and blood flowed from that mouth which spoke of Heaven. I saw Him go to Herod dressed in white to mock His Kingship. I saw . . . [*Her voice breaks.*] . . . I can no longer speak of it. They cried, "Let Him be scourged." And then I came down here to look for thee. [*She is now at the foot of the steps and she turns towards Varrus.*] His Mother stayed. [*Softly.*] I must return to her.

[*The door opens; the crack of whips is heard regularly above the rabble.*]

VOICES OF THE MOB. Crucify Him!
Let Him be crucified!
Upon the Cross!
Crucify Him!
A Cross!

[*The door closes behind Miriam; her hair is dishevelled, her garments dirty and ill-arranged; her face haggard. She peers into the darkness and sees Mary about to ascend the steps.*]

MIRIAM. Mary! Thou art here! [*She runs into Mary's arms.*] Stay, and let me stay until this dreadful hour is past.

MARY. Why didst thou come in this gloomy hole, my Miriam?

MIRIAM. I could not endure that frightful judgment place above, so I stumbled in this door. I knew not where it led.

MARY [*soothingly*]. But we must away from here at once. It is a prison.

MIRIAM. Prison? And can I fear bars, or stripes or death itself after I have seen that awful scourging? Mary, He *is* God. No other could endure it.

MARY [*her face drawn*]. Do they scourge Him still?

MIRIAM. It will never end — nor can I bear it longer.

MARY. I must hasten back. I left His Mother standing there. We must find another place. No one may enter here.

MIRIAM. Nay, I cannot pass that door again. For if I tell them I have walked all night — that I shall go mad, if I cross that courtyard — that I have no more tears to shed — that I have cried my heart out, will they not let me rest on these steps? . . . Mary, I have looked for Varrus — and I have not found him.

MARY. Be thou sure that he doth what he can to help the Master. Look no more. [*She chokes up with tears.*] I fear it is too late.

MIRIAM [*spiritedly*]. While Varrus lives and I have strength to seek him, it is *not* too late.

[*Varrus has been motionless within his cell; the old woman is huddled against the wall at the left; Oreb is standing left of Varrus' door.*]

VARRUS [*impulsively.*] Miriam!

MIRIAM. I hear his voice! [*Reproachfully to Mary.*] Why hast thou tried to keep me from him? [*She breaks away from Mary who was bringing her out.*] Let me go! I hear his voice here in this very room.

VARRUS [*to Oreb*]. Cursed be my tongue. Why did I speak?

MIRIAM [*rushing down the steps, frantically*]. Where

art thou? [*She looks into the first cell; then at Oreb; then she goes to middle cell and Varrus turns from the door. She stops, stares, and catches herself as if from falling.*] Varrus. . . [*The voice changes to something like a cry of pain.*] . . . Here!

[*Varrus comes towards the door of the cell and stares at her helplessly. She looks around bewildered and then turns and pulls at the big lock. It does not move; she falls to her knees, still clinging to it. Mary hurries near her, but stops as Varrus lifts her to her feet. He is still silent.*]

MIRIAM [*touching him and the bars between them as if uncertain of their reality*]. Varrus — why art thou in here — when I need thee so?

VARRUS [*as if the question were not clear*]. Here? . . . Me? . . .

[*The silence is painful. Varrus lowers his head. Miriam turns, draws away from the cell door and looks at Oreb.*]

OREB. Lady, he was . . .

VARRUS [*interrupting sharply*]. Miriam — [*very quietly and with hesitation*] they put me here last night for being drunk.

MIRIAM [*a muffled cry escapes her*]. Not when I was searching everywhere. Tell me the truth.

VARRUS [*slowly*]. It is so.

[*Miriam looks at Oreb and the boy lowers his eyes; she looks beseechingly at Magdalen who falters for a second and then turns towards the outer door; she turns furiously upon Varrus.*]

MIRIAM. And they are killing Him. Why hast

thou — *thou* — forsaken us? Oh God of Israel, where is our hope?

MOTHER OF JUDAS. Harken not to him. I know the truth. I heard him tell they put him here because he sold the Master.

MARY [*in sudden anger*]. That is not so.

MIRIAM [*turning hopefully on Mary — but with a vague unspeakable fear manifest in her voice*]. Not — not for thirty pieces. It was not he. Say, "No," Mary.

MARY. The one who sold his Master to these beasts was . . .

VARRUS [*bursting in upon her*]. Cease! Speak not that name to me! Wilt thou drive me mad?

[*They stand back looking at him; the old woman is unconvinced.*]

MOTHER OF JUDAS. Loud talk cannot wash thee white. 'Twas from thy lips I heard it. If my boy could lay his hands on thee. . . To think of selling one so good — so like to God Himself.

MIRIAM [*moving to bars again*]. Thou art hiding something, Varrus. Speak! [*Fearfully.*] Did my father's bidding bring thee here?

[*Magdalen and Oreb exchange glances; Varrus becomes tense.*]

VARRUS [*relaxing and speaking slowly*]. Thy father's wish was but a slight request upon my men. I did it readily but later, mad with joy, I looked for wine, forgetting that I was a Roman soldier. They brought me here. — These cold damp walls have brought me to myself.

MIRIAM. Didst thou know that they had taken Him?

OREB [*breaking the ensuing silence*]. I told him, lady.

MIRIAM [*a note of reproach overshadowed by grief in her voice*]. All the long night have I sought thee everywhere — asking Roman soldiers and fleeing from their laughter. Hoping too that I might see the Master to express my gratitude for all that He hath done for us. Varrus, it was He who warmed my father's heart.

VARRUS. Little dost thou realize how grim a truth thou speakest.

MIRIAM. Thou alone couldst help Him, who art here for being — no ! I will not say the word. I know it is not true.

MARY [*attempting to divert her attention*]. Didst thou see the Master ?

MIRIAM. Outside the court of Caiphas, I stood and heard the shouting. Someone said they struck Him — and that many spoke against Him. Through that mockery, I stood outside the wall and waited — just to catch a glimpse as He came out — just to show Him that I would be glad to suffer with Him. I was standing near the gate and when it was swung back — I saw — my father. Thou canst not imagine what a shock I felt to see my father there in that tribunal. Like a thief I fled lest he should see and send me home.

MARY. Then ?

MIRIAM. Then I went again in search of Varrus. Nor do I remember where it led. Dawn was breaking and I found myself back at the priest's house. There I spoke to one called Peter; though I could have touched him as I spoke, he never saw me. Tears were

streaming down his cheeks — his eyes were wild! I knew the Master had been led to Pilate.

MOTHER OF JUDAS. Aye, I know that Peter well. A good and solid man he is — but with one great failing. He would have himself made first — even before my son.

MIRIAM [*as no one is listening to the old woman*]. Again I sought this palace, for I knew thou [*to Varrus*] wouldst be here, and once again the soldiers laughed at me. The Master had been dragged to Herod. And then [*she seems to be wandering off in her speech*] — and then — I know not where I went. I found myself again up in the courtyard, and there I saw the God-man for the first time in my life. But oh! the sight! 'Tis all I see! They had Him fastened to a massive pillar. I saw the scourges iron-thonged! I saw the cloak which Herod had thrown round Him torn away. I saw His Face! I see It now! I stumbled in this door to blot the vision from my eyes — but it will be before me till I die.

MARY [*softly as she wipes away a tear*]. Miriam, where was His Mother? I should have remained with her.

MIRIAM [*seeming not to hear her*]. And thou [*to Varrus*] — thou art here. [*The last words sound the depths of despair.*]

[*The door opens and Phanuel enters hurriedly, closing it immediately on the howling mob.*]

PHANUEL [*in loud voice*]. Where is the guard? Hath he escaped? [*He hurries down the steps and assures himself that Varrus is still in safe keeping; he turns to the others.*] What do all these here? Do

they not know that no one is allowed inside this prison? Miriam! thou seekest goodly company.

[*The unbidden guests are surprised at his coming and are fearfully silent.*]

VARRUS. Thou Jewish dog! Were not these bars between us, I should . . .

MIRIAM. Varrus! Speak not that way to a friend. For all thou knowest he hath come to help us. [*To Phanuel.*] Phanuel, wilt thou not help us save the Nazarene? For my sake, if no other motive guides thee!

PHANUEL [*his easy manner still with him*]. Nothing in my power could gainsay such a plea. But I know nothing of the Galilean. The Sanhedrin — thy father too — is judging Him because of His great crimes against the state. [*Pausing and smiling at her.*] One thing thou must thank me for — our plans have had success.

MIRIAM [*puzzled*]. Plans? I never heard of them. And why am I to thank thee?

PHANUEL [*majestically*]. Because I saved thee from thy father's folly, saved thee from disgrace and sacrilege before the people. Now the farce is over — there is no more need for secrecy.

MIRIAM. Farce? What art thou saying now? I understand thee not.

PHANUEL. Thy father in a fit of madness sold thee to this Roman — and even put the heinous deed on paper. But knowing death was preferable to such a breach of law, I proved this man's true worth — and thou art free — to be my wife.

[*Miriam stands back toward the door of the cell. Var-*

rus puts a protecting hand on her shoulder and raises the other menacingly towards Phanuel who halts in his approach.]

VARRUS. One step more ! Just come within my reach.

PHANUEL [*changing his half-leering expression into one of unconcern*]. Oh well ! there is no point in whipping prisoners. [*To Miriam.*] Thou need'st not fear this man, my promised one. The Roman shall not harm thee. My name would suffer, should I touch a traitor.

MIRIAM. Traitor ? Thou — to use that word ! Thou didst howl with that mad pack last night against the Nazarene. Thou didst cry out that a King — thy King — should suffer death. Thou wouldst dare call anyone a traitor ?

PHANUEL. Suppose I tell thee, woman, that he bribed thy doting father — that even now thou wert signed over to him. He — a functionary of a curs'd tribe's torture engine; thou — the spotless daughter of an honorable Jew.

MIRIAM [*hotly*]. What is that to thee ?

PHANUEL [*losing his composure*]. No more than that I have a greater right. Since when have Jewish women the choosing of their husbands ?

MIRIAM. Thy right is forfeit. All those things the Nazarene has changed.

PHANUEL [*seeing that his tactics are unsuccessful*]. Thy game is coolly played unto the end. I have but admiration for thy wish to spare his feelings. If thou didst speak the truth, I think 'twould be more kind.

MIRIAM [*advancing towards him but not entirely out of*

the protecting reach of Varrus]. Speak out! I will not endure thy torturing insinuations.

PHANUEL. There is no need to spare him more. His head — a thing of subtle schemes and personal ambition — will bound along the stones before the dawn.

MARY [*interrupting*]. Come, Miriam. As long as thou art here, he will but torture thee. He has no thought of helping us. I must go to the Mother of the Master. [*She nears the steps, her head bent forward.*]

MIRIAM. I will come soon. But I will know what they — what thou art keeping from me. [*To Phanuel.*] Either thou art terrifying me with idle words or thou art some way guilty of this thing. [*Pointing to Varrus.*] What is the meaning of thy words?

PHANUEL [*deliberately*]. I mean thou hast little right to label me a traitor, when he — this loyal son of Rome — has sold the Nazarene to us.

MOTHER OF JUDAS [*muttering to herself*]. I knew it was the truth. I heard him say it.

[*Miriam looks at Varrus uncomprehendingly; then back to Phanuel.*]

PHANUEL. Rome stands for many things but not for treason in a soldier. But when a soldier plots with hostile leaders; or when an officer betrays his chief; when anyone accepts a bribe, the punishment of Rome is final.

VARRUS. Thou art a liar! Every word is false. And may the Galilean know my innocence.

MARY. Miriam, he is not guilty. Trust him, dear, and seek to know no more.

PHANUEL [*looking up at the speaker and replying*

coolly]. Many words — high sounding pledges — from all sorts of places. But I have facts. And in this question, Rome's opinion matters. [*To Miriam.*] Thy friend is in a Roman prison. And thou for all thy sympathy and wailing put him there. That and that alone is what I mean.

MIRIAM. I? I put him there? [*She speaks in a far-away voice.*] I?

PHANUEL. Amazed, art thou? Thou hypocrite! I know not who is worse. The man who sold his country or the woman who is mocking him.

MIRIAM [*seizing the bars while Varrus looks from one to the other*]. Varrus! No! I am not mocking thee. Tell me truly, what hath brought thee here? [*Varrus is terribly silent; he is glaring at Phanuel.*]

PHANUEL [*ironically*]. Thou art not mocking him. Ah, no! Far be such thoughts from thee. At first I thought I had saved thee from thy father's madness. But after thou hast placed the Roman far beyond all harm, thy fickleness — thou second Rhea — spurns thy benefactor and turns thee to the Roman. The woman who first tricked me has been far too good a teacher. What is thy motive? Wilt thou kill all men and drive them mad? — And then thou asked if I would save the Nazarene from death. Duplicity without compare! 'Twas thou who bound the hands of Rome that we might capture Him. [*He is almost shouting.*]

MIRIAM [*slowly comprehending, she draws her hands across her eyes and looks at Varrus*]. I made . . . thee swear . . . to give the Nazarene . . . unto these dogs . . . ! [*She grasps the bars and speaks*

more quickly.] I brought a God to meet His death! [*Her head falls against the iron door.*] Oh, God, my God, forgive me!

VARRUS [*putting an arm on her shoulder and speaking softly*]. No! Miriam. Believe him not. I did not take the Prophet. My promise was to let the Temple guards protect the city. This deicide has poisoned Pilate's mind by these foul lies. And now the Procurator will not hear me.

MIRIAM. My father's bond was *not* about the Master? [*There is a note of hope in her voice.*]

PHANUEL [*before Varrus has a chance to answer*]. The humor is pathetic now. 'Twas thou who wrote the bond, I swear. 'Twas in a woman's hand. [*Taking the bond from his girdle to the amazement of Varrus.*] Read — and confess. I take a pleasure in the naked truth! [*He holds the bond where she may read it, not allowing her to touch it and keeping it and himself out of the reach of Varrus. She roughly wipes away her tears and reads the script.*]

MIRIAM. [*She becomes tense. All look at her intently; even Phanuel is gripped. Staring wild-eyed into space she speaks.*] I killed a God. 'Tis true! 'Tis true! And oh! I loved Him so! [*She falls back against the bars where now she is entirely supported by Varrus. She speaks as to an Invisible Person in the room. All are awed and listen.*] Jesus, my Lord, I knew not what my father's bond required. I thought it was a blessing for Thy people. Thou knowest that I meant to help — Thou knowest how I tried to save Thy life. Canst Thou — canst Thou forgive me? [*Extending her hands.*] How happy

would I be to die in place of Thee to-day — and yet 'tis I who brought Thee to this mob.

[*A distant trumpet is heard outside; Mary Magdalen opens the door. The trumpet is heard much more clearly. The mob outside becomes silent. All within look towards the door.*]

FIRST VOICE [*deep and far away but very distinct*]. Behold the Man ! Behold your King !

SECOND VOICE [*harsh and strident*]. We have no king but Cæsar.

OTHER VOICES [*in a sullen roar with these expressions predominating*]. Cæsar is our King . . . He is no King . . . Cæsar . . . No King . . . Only Cæsar . . . Not the Nazarene . . . [*Etc.*]

SECOND VOICE. Crucify Him !

OTHER VOICES. Let Him be crucified ! . . . Death ! . . . Crucify the King !

A ROAR OF MINGLED VOICES. Crucify Him ! . . . Put Him to death ! . . . His blood upon our heads ! . . . Crucify Him ! . . . Death ! . . . A Cross ! . . . Crucify ! . . . No King but Cæsar ! . . . Crucify Him ! . . .

[*The trumpet is heard again.*]

FIRST VOICE [*after the noise is quiet*]. I, Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judæa, in the name of the august Emperor, Claudius Tiberius, condemn this man of seditious character — violator of Jewish laws, a dangerous disturber of the public peace, a blasphemer who calls Himself the Son of God — to be nailed to a cross until He die.

[*Mary Magdalen rushes out. The door swings shut and all is silent.*]

MIRIAM [*taking a step forward*]. Didst thou hear those awful words? 'Twas I — 'twas *I* who spoke them. But oh, my God! I did not know! — A cross they said . . . To die — and on a cross!

VARRUS [*his hands extended towards her*]. Miriam — 'tis not thy fault. It is decreed by God! There is reason for this thing hidden from our eyes. We were blind and only now has He restored our sight. Can He hold us guilty — when we offer Him our lives?

PHANUEL. We have taken Whom we sought — and we thank you both. [*To Varrus.*] If we need a substitute thou shalt be informed. I must go. There are some things I have to oversee.

VARRUS. Remember, I have things to oversee when I am freed. Prepare to meet this God Whom thou art this day crucifying.

PHANUEL. A caged man like a captive lion makes a deal of noise; a headless one is silent. Thou shalt explain thy deeds to this impostor long ere I. No doubt thy recompense will be one similar to his. Then there will be time to talk the matter over. [*Laughing.*] Such a pair. A Roman traitor and a Jew who thinks Himself a God!

MIRIAM. Is there no heart at all within thy breast? I beg of thee let me die for Him. Let Varrus out to fight for Him. Take both of us. We have no fear of thee — but spare the Master. [*She approaches him beseechingly, leaving the cell door.*] What dost thou ask of me that thou wilt save Him from this cross?

PHANUEL [*leering at Varrus*]. A noble offer, I might say — an offer made too late.

MIRIAM. No! Not too late! Say not too late! If

thou wouldst but retract thy lies to Pilate and set Varrus free, there is yet time.

PHANUEL [*laughing*]. Now thou hast turned to me again. The treachery of a Rhea fills thy words. First, I was cast aside for this base traitor [*pointing to Varrus*] whom thou hadst deceived. And now, seized by a passion for another of thy victims, thou wouldst destroy the honor of the Roman—yea and his very life. Will I defile myself to listen now? Thou art too late I tell thee! [*Loudly to all.*] Get out of here, you fools. 'Tis not a public function. The guard will close those doors [*pointing to the empty cells*] and lock you in.

[*The old woman hurries to the steps. Oreb hesitates, left of cell door.*]

MIRIAM [*making no move at Phanuel's command, turns to Varrus*]. Canst thou forgive me, Varrus, if the Master does? Canst thou forgive a woman who has killed the ones she loves; the One Divine she hangs upon a cross — adores her God when He is cold in death; the other human, but unlike all men — her sum of happiness — she makes a traitor for her selfish ends — and comes at last to kiss a lifeless head. [*Piteously.*] Canst — thou — forgive?

[*Phanuel grasps her arm and twists it, pushing her before him. He is facing the steps with his back to Varrus and Oreb. Oreb standing directly before the cell door, quickly draws a short dagger from his girdle and raising it, takes a step towards Phanuel. Varrus sees and strikes it from the boy's hand. All this action occupies but a moment and Phanuel at the sound*

of the dagger on the hard floor turns, releasing the girl.]

VARRUS [*softly*]. That way is too merciful. . . Besides the debt is *mine.*

[*Oreb, his head lowered, walks to the steps and ascends them; Phanuel is too terrified to touch him. Miriam remains at foot of steps watching Varrus, and Phanuel pushes her roughly so that she falls upon them full length, uttering a stifled cry of pain at the impact. Varrus seizes the bars; the old woman opens the door and the rabble is heard. Miriam rises painfully and following the old woman and Oreb, precedes Phanuel out into the court. The door is left open and the shouting is heard clearly.*]

VOICES OF THE MOB. Where is the Cross ? . . . Take Him to Golgotha ! . . . Crucify Him ! . . . His blood be upon us ! . . . And our children . . . Bring the blasphemer to his cross ! . . . Crucify Him ! . . . Save Thyself ! . . . Where is Thy kingdom ? . . . Crucify Him . . . On the Cross ! . . . [*Etc.*]

[*The door is slammed by someone outside.*]

[*Varrus listens a moment; puts his hands over his ears as though he still hears the noises; staggers a bit at the barred door; drops to his knees, still straining to get a glimpse of the outer door; slowly lowers his head.*]

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Scene: Same as Act I except that the sky is dark and thunder is heard from time to time. Flashes of lightning illuminate the sky.

Time: Good Friday afternoon during the crucifixion.

AT RISE: *Lora is at rear middle looking over the city fearfully. An ominous rumble is heard and she clutches her veil about her. Rhea comes out of doorway at right.*

RHEA. Splendid preparations thou art making for the feast. Dost thou think the well will come to thee?

LORA [*submissively, but with a note of unwillingness*]. I go, my lady, — yet the sky is dark.

RHEA [*cuttingly*]. Have never clouds obscured the sun in all thy useless life?

LORA. Yea — but never with such meaning, lady. Nature weeps, for evil hath been done. [*A low distant rumble is heard and Lora instinctively looks over the balustrade. She starts.*]

RHEA. What hast thou seen, superstitious wretch?

LORA. It fell.

RHEA. What fell?

LORA [*breathless*]. The little wall down by the row of tombs. A man was passing, close to them. I think it fell upon him. No! He is walking from the wreckage now.

RHEA [*going over to the balustrade*]. It was a totter-

ing old wall, and could not stand the slightest breath of air. [*She looks more intently at the spot.*] Who is that man? [*In an excited cry.*] 'Tis Jobal.

LORA [*still trembling*]. I knew it. And it is a sign that nature cries against him.

RHEA [*angrily*]. Go get thy water-jars, thou sign-believing fool. Dost thou think words like thine shall go unpunished? Thy master will be told of this. [*Lora hurries out left.*] Nature crying out 'gainst Jobal! [*Laughing contemptuously.*] He'd think himself lord God of nature were I to insist. [*She looks over the balustrade again.*] He trembles like a man who has the palsy and fumbles like a thief at his own door. [*She walks back and forth on the roof until Jobal has had time to mount the stairs. He enters left front.*]

JOBAL [*breathless and worried; he looks at the sturdy walls of the rooms beside him; his voice is hoarse and hollow*]. It is done.

RHEA. And Israel is proud of thee, my lord.

JOBAL [*fastening his cloak more tightly about him and looking down moodily*]. Israel may well be proud. It was no common man we put to death. Behold the color of the sun [*he looks up*] — why, there is no sun! I saw a sickly sun a while ago — but it was next to nothing. What kind of man has power over light?

RHEA. My lord, great deeds have strange effect upon thee. Thou hast this once o'er-stepped thy customary rut and while there is life in thee wilt thou tremble. [*Enthusiastically.*] This day marks thy coming into power.

JOBAL. I am not trembling at my deeds. It was good work — good work. But there are evil signs abroad. A wall just fell beside me as I passed. I felt that it was meant to crush me dead — but something in the Wonder-Worker's plans must have miscarried.

RHEA. 'Tis but a dark and windy day. That wall was long since doomed. It merely happened that thou passed it by when its ill-fitting stones could stand no longer. Devils do not bother helping cold and lifeless corpses. Thou hast stayed the Wonder-Worker's hand and held his tongue with all its blasphemies. Be not troubled with him any longer. He — is — silent.

JOBAL. Yea! Silent with a silence that chills me through and through. We did all the shouting. He was silent all the while I stayed there. [*Another rumble is heard. He folds his hands on his breast nervously and looks at the house.*] When the earth first moaned I was beside that cross. He looked on me. [*He shudders involuntarily.*] No one could have looked Him in the eye as He hung there.

RHEA. Is He not dead?

JOBAL [*in shaking voice*]. Not before I left the place. He hath died ere now — if such can die. It seems they cannot suffer. [*A little of the old bravado is returning.*] Withal we nailed Him safely to the cross and not a cushioned throne it was, I tell thee. [*He looks at the crosses dimly outlined on the horizon.*]

RHEA. Dost thou know I have not seen thee since thou left to see the Roman? Tell me about Varrus.

JOBAL [*smiling to himself*]. He is ours. For all his Roman shrewdness, he was glad to take the bond, and he has carried out its every clause. Before much time has passed he will be here to claim his prize.

RHEA [*ironically*]. Be sure thou hast the prize before awarding her.

JOBAL [*questioningly*]. Be sure I have her? Is she not my child?

RHEA. It is not who she is — but where she is that should concern thee now.

JOBAL [*looking at her intently*]. Is she not here — within the house?

RHEA. She hath not been here all day — nor was she in the house last night.

JOBAL [*raising his voice in fear*]. Miriam not at home all night? Where can she be?

RHEA [*suavely*]. That question hath a place in my mind too.

JOBAL. Tell me truly now. Not all last night? Thou art quite sure of what thou sayest?

RHEA [*returning hotly*]. Dost thou think that I was out all night? Would I not know? Or am I like her in thy opinion?

JOBAL [*lost for words and without expression*]. No . . . and yet I wonder . . . Could she have been in that mob?

RHEA. I warned thee she was following the Nazarene.

JOBAL [*whining*]. I am disgraced if that be known. Thou seemest not to understand how wrong a thing like that would be. 'Tis more and more of his unearthly power. I well knew He was having His revenge when that wall crumbled.

RHEA. Think less about the dead, my lord. It is the living who can harm thee.

JOBAL. I understand! [*Vehemently.*] Thou meanest Varrus. If I thought the Roman had made certain of his payment, straightway unto Pilate would I . . .

RHEA [*interrupting him impatiently*]. Least of all — the Roman need concern thee. If she went to him thou wouldst be innocent before the state. There are others who are far more dangerous. Do any others know about the bond?

[*Phanuel enters left front unannounced. He is breathless and apparently has been running.*]

PHANUEL. Where hath she concealed him? Is he hiding in this house?

JOBAL [*dumbstruck*]. Here? Art thou gone mad? [*Pointing to the crosses.*] We left Him hanging on a cross.

PHANUEL. Delay me not with thy pretended ignorance. Thou knowest well of whom I speak. The Roman Varrus has escaped.

JOBAL. Escaped?

RHEA. Escaped from where?

PHANUEL. His soldiers got him out of Pilate's prison.

JOBAL [*excitedly*]. Pilate's prison? Not the man who let us pass last night?

PHANUEL. What other Varrus is there?

RHEA [*in angry surprise to Jobal*]. Varrus? Why was *he* in Pilate's prison?

PHANUEL [*scornfully*]. As if thou dost not know. 'Twas thy clever work that put him there. [*Speaking with precision.*] I will shed the light on thy pre-

tended ignorance. Varrus is a traitor. Treason unto Rome is his offence. [*Bitterly sarcastic.*] Now wilt thou have me explain the meaning of the words? [*Turning on Jobal with fury.*] Is thy daughter hiding him in here?

JOBAL. Why, I have not seen the man since we were standing in his chamber. [*He is trembling.*] Tell me, hast thou seen my daughter Miriam?

PHANUEL. Miriam? Hath she gone too? [*Seizing Jobal's sleeve.*] Thou must help me find the pair. This very day hath she refused to wed me.

JOBAL [*stepping back*]. To wed *thee? Thou* hast even signed the bond which gave her to the Roman. [*Rhea starts.*]

PHANUEL. The Roman? [*Becoming furious.*] Dost thou mean that scrap of paper? Why — it was a joke! I had thy word it was the Roman's trap! Thou hast promised that thy daughter was to be my wife.

JOBAL [*angrily*]. Thou hast signed that paper and I dare say thou hast read it. Thou mayst marry Esther if thou'll let a few years pass. Her closed eyes will never see thine ugliness, and I shall have kept my word, as Laban did of old.

PHANUEL. Prince of liars! Thou hast made a bad choice in thy victim! [*Now beside himself.*] This is not done with such ease. What of the law of Israel?

JOBAL [*carelessly*]. Then what of the law? When Rome is in my grasp, shall I not *be* the law?

RHEA [*who has been looking from one to the other throughout the conversation*]. Thou bungling fool!

What does *he* [*pointing to Phanuel*] know of thy bond ?

JOBAL *in surprise and indignation*]. The Roman wanted witnesses — and he [*nodding towards Phanuel*] was in the palace.

PHANUEL. Yea — *thou* shalt be the law. Hast thou forgotten that thy man is fleeing from it now ? A price rests on his head — and it will go to fill my purse.

JOBAL. Thou sayest that the Roman hath no longer any power ? [*He is frightened.*] And is my daughter with him ?

PHANUEL. I doubt that he will have her now. She came to me to-day to say I was her only hope. [*Scornfully.*] Why should he take the like of her to burden him in flight ?

JOBAL. She came to thee ! Where ? Where was this ?

PHANUEL. I am compelled to tell thee nothing more. Thou dost not merit courtesy from me.

JOBAL [*ignoring the insult*]. But was she in that mob ?

PHANUEL [*with a sneering laugh*]. If one may judge by looks, she might have been. [*A rumble is heard.*]

JOBAL [*nervously looking in the direction of the crosses and shuddering*]. More of His revenge. At every turn I find Him in my path. Oh God of Abraham, I should have known. It was that Man's revenge that hurried Judas to our doors.

PHANUEL. Thy game was played well while it ran its course. But I played too. And now my enemies are turned about. The Nazarene hangs dying on a cross. Thou [*to Rhea*] with thy loud wails for revenge hath found it slow in coming. Miriam — the haughty one — came crying at my feet. The

Roman swine is running for his life. [*Significantly to Jobal.*] Old man, thy plans are failing. Wilt thou yield and grant my wish or shall I crush thee?

JOBAL [*brokenly*]. What have I to lose? Do thou thy worst! Thy time will come. One will be avenged on thee — because thou helped to hang Him on a cross. Thy time will come. Be careful for thyself.

RHEA [*in an impassioned attack on Jobal*]. Mutter now about a dead man. Now thou art content! My life — thou hast spoiled — a life of plans and hopes and longings! The imbecility which failing years have brought on thee has made a woman who might be the queen of all the land — an outcast. Power had I — and I ventured it in thy limp hands, but thou — thy name is hateful to mine ears — hast flung it from thee to the ground. What is left in life for me?

JOBAL [*defeated*]. Where will I find courage now to fight the foes without, when I am forsaken by the woman of my heart? [*He makes a gesture towards the crosses.*] On Thy cross — Thou hast the greater victory!

PHANUEL. I stand upon thy answer. My time could better far be spent in searching for the Roman. I want thy daughter Miriam — and if thou art not quick to grant my wish thou shalt be another one of those who feel my power.

JOBAL. While life lingers in this feeble frame — one yet lives who will not yield. I go forth — I go to find my daughter. She perchance remembers me. She may still be true. [*He draws his cloak about*

him and starts slowly towards the door at left.]

PHANUEL [*standing insolently in front of Jobal*]. True! [*He laughs cuttingly.*] True to the Nazarene, if that is being true. Thou dar'st come between me and the thing I seek. Mark well thy decision! I go now to find the Roman. I return — to — thee! [*Phanuel goes off left front.*]

JOBAL [*noticing the falling darkness.*] The sky is dark. It is His sign!

RHEA [*looking at him wildly*]. May that dark sky fall on thee! That drooping beard, those lying parchments tied about that head — how I despise them! Not quite good enough to earn the favor of thy God, nor brave enough to win a place with men. Thou worthless, witless wrecker of a life which might have made thine great. . . Go! Go and find the wretch. She helped enough in thy undoing.

JOBAL [*helplessly*]. But she is mine. And I must go to someone.

RHEA. Aye! Thou art now compassionate! Thou slinking beast! It seems the Nazarene was none of thine.

JOBAL. He is having His revenge! He threw a wall upon me as I ran. And these old legs could hardly bear me soon enough from out its shadow. I tremble lest the earth beneath me open, and in some pit I shall behold that blood-stained face — those lips which would not speak. If Miriam were here she might remove this awful curse.

RHEA. Then wait for her. Stand there and cringe before a dead man's memory. I leave thee and thy hated house. I go from people at whose hands my

life has been as death. From everything — to anything. [*She moves towards left front.*] Yea — even unto that grim corpse on yonder cross, to beg that its revenge be swifter — surer — more complete. [*Scornfully she brushes by him and goes off left front.*]

JOBAL [*stares after her in amazement. He puts out a hesitant arm as if to detain her but it is too late. She is gone. He turns back and stands with bowed head, shrivelled in fear.*] And thou wilt be the greatest man in Israel! Ha! Ha! [*His laugh is a hollow chilling thing.*] Pilate will go on his knees before thee! Ha! He was a Wonder-Worker — thou a fool. [*A terrific rumble and quake follow. Jobal runs madly from side to side until it becomes quiet.*] He must have died with that. But I had rather far be dead than one who killed Him. [*A stone falls from the crenelated balustrade. He kneels beside it.*] Be merciful to my old age, O God! Let death come down upon me that I may fly these fears. I am brave as any man before Thy fatal summons — but mortal man cannot endure revenge of one no longer here. Call forth my soul — to damn it if Thou wilt — but make my battle with the Wonder-Worker one between two spirits — not between a mighty spirit and this trembling flesh.

[*A rumble is heard and Jobal goes off left front, half running.*]

[*The curtain is lowered to indicate the passage of half an hour.*]

[AT RISE: *Esther walks timidly across the room. She is weeping.*]

ESTHER. Miriam, where hast thou gone? The thunder frightens me.

LORA [*entering from right*]. What art thou seeking, little one?

ESTHER [*searching from one chair to another*]. I want my sister, Miriam. She has been gone *all* day. I am so lonesome — and afraid of thunder.

LORA [*putting her arms around the child*]. But she will come back soon, dear. Perhaps she went to buy thee pretty things from eastern traders. And then the thunder will be gone, and thou shalt smile again.

ESTHER [*petulantly*]. I will not smile until my Miriam is with me. She never even told me she was going.

LORA. Suppose the lady who was with thee yesterday should see those tears. She would not think thee half so good or pretty as thou art.

ESTHER. And I would tell her why I cried. How Miriam had gone away and left me in this thunder.

LORA. Little girls should go to sleep when thunder fills the air. Thou shouldst not be fearful for thyself in this strong house. Thou shouldst say a little prayer for Miriam, and come with me till I sing thee to sleep.

ESTHER. If I go to sleep for thee will Miriam come back?

LORA. Just as soon as thou hast closed thine eyes.

ESTHER. And will she be safe where all this thunder will not harm her?

LORA. If thou come with me and go to sleep.

ESTHER [*smiles, wipes away the tears and hurries to Lora's side.*] What songs wilt thou sing for me? [*They go off left.*]

[*Miriam enters from left front. Her clothes are dirty; her veil is tattered; her hair is dishevelled; she is dully staring through glazed eyes, seeming to see something not perceived by mortals. She stumbles in her walk and with difficulty reaches the divan where she falls upon it.*]

MIRIAM [*raising herself on her hands*]. Home! She *seems surprised at the word.*] But I am homeless now. There is no home for me. [*She tries to rise but fails.*] He fell like this. I saw Him fall. His mother saw Him too. [*Pause.*] — But He was struck and made to go along that awful road. Why do they leave *me* here? [*Softly.*] *I* made Him fall. [*She turns and assumes a half-sitting, half-crouching position facing front.*] Varrus! Tell Him I did not mean to make Him fall. [*Her hand was raised toward an imaginary person but it falls back hopelessly.*] No! Thou canst not. Thou art in a dungeon — a hole beneath the ground and there are bars before thy face. — I did that too. [*Passionately.*] No! Varrus, no! I did not put thee there. Those bars were far too strong for me to break — or I should have thee free — beside me now. I need thee so. [*A terrible rumble of thunder is heard. She draws her hand across her face. It has grown very dark.*] — Is that the King approaching? He wore a crown! Thorns! Thorns! Thorns! Long piercing thorns. [*Turning again.*] Varrus, I brought no thorns to *thee* — but His thorns were my doing. [*Brokenly.*] I only put thee in a dungeon. Perhaps thou canst escape — but He is far beyond all hope . . . He had a Cross . . . My God! A Cross! . . .

[*She falls exhausted with her face resting on one arm. A word of her mutterings is distinct from time to time — a passionate monosyllable.*] Thorns ! A Cross ! . . .

[*Varrus enters left front cautiously. He wears a beggar's tattered cloak over that part of his uniform which he wore in prison. He looks around and stands aghast. Miriam is speaking. He drops the cloak and listens.*]

MIRIAM [*her head still on one arm. She does not see the Roman.*] Varrus — His mother was so kind to me. She said that He had pardoned me. Mary told me it was not my fault — but Oh ! I know it was. Wilt thou forgive if He forgives me, Varrus ?

VARRUS [*rushing over and kneeling at her side*]. Miriam ! Forgive thee ? What is there to forgive ? — Look at me, my Miriam. I am here — with thee.

MIRIAM [*assuming a half-sitting, half-reclining position with his help, is startled and bewildered at seeing him. It is still unreal to her.*] Varrus ! I was calling thee. [*She puts her hand on his face and examines his features like a blind person.*] The bars ! Where is the dungeon ?

VARRUS [*a break in his voice*]. Miriam, thou art at home. There is no dungeon here. I go away. The soldiers came with Oreb. Thou art home ! And I am with thee !

MIRIAM. 'Twas in the dungeon that I fell. [*She puts her hand to her head.*] And thou wert over there [*pointing*] — behind a door of bars.

VARRUS [*excited*]. Thou art hurt, Miriam. I heard thee fall upon those steps. [*Angrily.*] My score

with Phanuel is heavier than any debt of man. [*Pleadingly.*] Where didst thou hurt thyself ?

MIRIAM. 'Twas nothing — for I saw the Master fall. Oh Varrus ! He had thorns upon His head. Thou couldst but *hear* the scourging — I *saw* Him fall and saw the blood. Thou canst not *hear* a thing like blood !

VARRUS. Miriam, 'twill drive thee mad to think of awful sights like that. It was to be. — And I was helpless — 'Twas too late.

MIRIAM [*piteously*]. Too late ! And I had locked thee in that dungeon.

VARRUS. The powers of hell had this all planned. Would not a God prevent them if He wished ? There is some reason for all this which we shall never know. And now when He has found His kingdom, will He not forgive us ?

MIRIAM. Ah ! If I had but a sign that He had pardoned me my sin. If He would smile on me and set my heart at rest. But since I learned about the bond and saw the cross and saw the thorns — what pardon is there left for me ?

VARRUS. Knowest not all things are known to Him ?

MIRIAM. Yea — all things — my blindness and my selfishness among them. If I but had a sign — a sign from him ! [*She puts her hand to her head again.*]

VARRUS. Miriam, thou art in pain. — And I must flee without thee. Thou must rest a while. And when 'tis safe I shall return to thee.

MIRIAM [*sadly*]. Varrus ! I have promised to go with the Nazarene. Life is all I have to give Him to amend my sin.

VARRUS [*lowering his head*]. Art thou leaving me alone — without thee ?

MIRIAM. That is what I offer Him. Oh ! If thou wert with me when I offer that poor gift.

VARRUS [*passionately*]. Go where'er thou wilt — I will not leave thee. Thou art mine !

MIRIAM. This time must thou stay behind. Thy time is not yet come. Thou art not racked by a pain which gnaws thy life away. — More — thou art a man, and canst do more for Him and me by waiting here a little while. Tell them He was good — that it was all for them He died and I will tell Him what I sacrificed to make amends — how I left thee here alone — alone. . . If I had a sign that I might know I am forgiven.

VARRUS [*in dismay*]. Where wilt thou be these long years that I am here alone ?

MIRIAM [*she is growing weaker*]. Ever watching over thee and begging Him to guide thee. — After I have taken out the thorns.

VARRUS [*beseechingly*]. Miriam ! Thou must not go. Does He demand that much — of us ?

MIRIAM. Dost thou ask me to refuse Him — hanging on a Cross — hanging on a cross at my command ? [*Varrus lowers his head.*] Say that thou wilt let me go — that thou wilt stay — for Him.

VARRUS [*his voice breaks*]. Go ! This base earth is not fit for thee. I will remain. But — Miriam . . .

[*The sky is so dark that nothing can be seen but the figures in the foreground, and an unnatural aureola which lights up the crosses on the hill.*]

MIRIAM. Yes ?

VARRUS. And wilt thou wait for me ?

MIRIAM. Forever ! [*She throws her arms around him and he kisses her.*]

[*Esther enters from right, but in the darkness she is almost indistinguishable. The light around the crosses alone attracts attention.*]

ESTHER. Light ! Light ! It must be light ! I see ! I see ! Miriam ! Where art thou ? I can see !

MIRIAM [*trying to rise*]. Esther, dear. Come ! Come to me ! [*She too sees the crosses. Varrus leads the excited child over to her sister.*] This is His sign. Show me those eyes that I may kiss them while there is yet time. [*She takes Esther in her arms and covers her with kisses.*] Those dear eyes — and He has given sight to them. — He heard my promise and He *did* forgive. This is His sign !

ESTHER. I see thee, Miriam, I see ! How I have prayed to see thee !

MIRIAM. Esther dear ! [*Pointing to the light. The characters on stage are almost silhouettes.*] That cross between the other two has given thee thy sight. [*She grows weaker.*] The pain is great. His eyes were bleeding too. [*Varrus is kneeling beside them.*] Varrus, it is over now. He has forgiven me. I — go — to thank Him . . . to take out the thorns.

[*She falls back dead. Varrus tries to raise her up. His face is white. Esther kneeling at one side touches Miriam's face in fear.*]

VARRUS. Miriam ! I am alone. Why didst thou go so soon ? [*He rises and looks at the cross.*]

ESTHER [*terrified*]. Miriam! Thou art so strange! Please smile — just once. I see thee! [*Kissing the dead girl.*] Where art thou going, Miriam? Where hast thou gone? Thou art not here! [*She looks at Varrus.*] . . . And art thou going too?

VARRUS [*seeing the terror in the child's face, he takes her in his arms*]. I have promised to remain with thee, my little one. Dost thou see a cross within that circle of bright light? . . . All the world hath bartered for that cross, and it is here. Miriam hath gone to wait for us within its shadow.

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